

A decorative border in a dark, textured color frames the central text. It features a repeating pattern of stylized flowers, leaves, and vines. The flowers have five petals and prominent centers, while the leaves are pointed and arranged in clusters. The vines are thin and winding, connecting the floral elements.

FROM THE
ANGLE OF
SEVENTEEN

EDEN
PHILLPOTTS



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FROM THE ANGLE OF
SEVENTEEN



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FROM THE ANGLE OF SEVENTEEN

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF
"THE HUMAN BOY," "THE HUMAN BOY AGAIN," ETC.

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1912



PK
577
F92

TO
HUGHES MASSIE
IN ALL FRIENDSHIP

628532



FROM THE ANGLE OF SEVENTEEN

I

WHEN the Doctor sent for me to his study, I hoped it was about the fireworks, because I was head boy that term, and, in a great position like that, there were advantages to make up for the anxiety. You bossed the fireworks on the fifth of November and many other such-like things.

But the Doctor had nothing to say about fireworks. In fact, a critical moment had come in my life : I was to leave.

“ Sit down, Corkey,” said the Doctor ; and that in itself was a startler, because he never asked anybody to sit down except parents or guardians.

I sat and he looked at me with a friendly and regretful expression, the same as he did when he had to tell me my father was dead.

“ Corkey,” he began, “ this morning brings

a missive from your maternal aunt, Miss Augusta Medwin. As you know, she is your trustee until you come of age, four years hence. Your Aunt Augusta, mindful that the time was at hand when you would be called to take your place in the ranks of action, has for some time been on the look-out for you; and to-day I learn that her efforts have been crowned with success. It is my custom to require a term's notice; but such is my regard for your Aunt Augusta that I have decided to waive that rule in your case. A clerkship in London has been secured for you—a nomination to the staff of that famous institution, the Apollo Fire Office. The necessary examination, to one who has risen to be head boy of Merivale, should prove but a trifle. And yet, since nothing can be left to chance, we must see that you are guarded at all points. In a fortnight, Corkey Major, you will be required to show that your mathematics are sound, your knowledge of grammatical construction above suspicion, and your general average of intellectual attainment all that the world of business—the great industrial centres of finance—have a right to demand from their neophytes. I do not fear for you: the

appointment and its requirements are not such as to demand a standard of accomplishment beyond your powers ; but, at the same time, remember that this modest beginning may lead the way to name and fame. The first step can never be too humble if we look upward to the next. I, myself, as all the world knows, was once engaged in the avocation of a bookseller's assistant. I have already conferred with Mr. Brown as to your mathematical attainments, and, making due allowance for his generous ardour to all that pertains to the First Form, I have no doubt with him that you will satisfy your examiners. Your handwriting, however, must be the subject of anxious thought, and, as you will be called upon in the course of the examination to write a brief essay on any subject that may occur to the examining authorities, I trust that you will be at pains to state your views in careful caligraphy. Again, if a word arises to your mind concerning the spelling of which you feel doubtful, discard it at once and strive to find another that will meet the case. Spelling, I have reason to know, is not a strong point with you."

The Doctor sighed and continued.

“ I am sorry to lose you,” he said. “ You have been a reasonably good and industrious boy. Your faults were those of youth. You go into the world armed, I think, at all points. Be modest, patient, and good-tempered; and choose high-minded friends. I may add, for your encouragement, that you will receive emolument from the outset of your official labours. The salary is fifty pounds a year, and you will work daily from ten o’clock until four. On Saturdays they pursue our own scholastic custom and give their officials a half-holiday. Your vacation, however, is of a trivial character. The world is a taskmaster, not a schoolmaster. One fortnight a year will be all the holiday permitted; and since you enter the establishment at the bottom, you must be prepared to enjoy this relaxation at any month in the year most convenient to your superiors. Should time and chance allow of it, Corkey Major, I may tell you that it will give me personal pleasure to see you on some occasion of this annual vacation—as a guest. Your two brothers continue with us until in their turn they pass out into the world from the little haven of Merivale.”

The idea of Merivale as a haven pleased the

Doctor. I hoped he had finished, but he went off again.

“ Yes, the simile is just. You come here empty and depart on your voyage laden. You are loaded according to your accommodation—some more, some less ; and I, the harbour-master—however, we will not push the image, for, to be frank, I am not sure as to what exactly pertains to a harbour-master’s duties in respect of cargo. To return, Mr. Brown will see you in his study after morning school with a view to some special lessons in arithmetic. He inclines to the opinion that the Rule of Three should prove a tower of strength, and no doubt he is right. You may go.”

He waved his hand and I got up. One thing had stuck exceedingly fast in my mind and now, though I did not mean to mention it in particular, it came out.

“ Am I really worth fifty pounds a year to anybody, sir ? ”

The Doctor smiled.

“ A natural question, Corkey, and I think no worse of you for having asked it. The magnitude of the sum may reasonably puzzle a lad who as yet cannot appreciate the value of money. This, however, is no time to enter

upon the complicated question of supply and demand. It will be sufficient for you to know that the Managers of the Apollo Fire Office are in reasonable hopes of getting their money's worth—to speak colloquially. For my part, when I think upon your ten years of steady work at Merivale, I have no hesitation in saying the salary is not extravagant. Let it be your part to administer it with prudence and swiftly to convince those set in authority over you that you are worth more than that annual sum rather than less."

I cleared out and told the chaps, and they were all fearfully interested, especially Morgan, because when I left Morgan would become the head of the school. He turned a sort of dirty-drab green when he heard that I was going; and first I thought it was sorrow for me, and then I found it was funk for himself. He didn't care a button about losing me; but he felt that to be lifted up all of a sudden to the top was almost too much.

"I feel like the Pope felt when he found he was going to be elected," he said. "Only it's far worse for me than him, because he needn't have entered the competition for Pope, I suppose, if he didn't want; but, in

my case, the thing is a sort of law of nature, and I've got to be head boy."

"There are the advantages," I said. But he could only see the responsibilities. He wasn't pretending: he really hated the idea—for the moment.

I told my chum, Frost, too; and I told him that I'd asked the Doctor whether I was worth fifty pounds a year to anybody.

"If he'd been straight," said Frost, "he'd have told you that you've been worth fifty pounds a year to him, anyway—for countless years; because you came here almost as soon as you were born, and your brothers, too."

It was a great upheaval, like things always seem to be when they happen, however much you expect them. Of course I knew I had to go sometime, and was thankful to think so, and full of ambitions for grown-up life; but now that the moment had actually come, I wasn't particularly keen about it. Especially as I should miss the fireworks and lose the various prizes I was a snip for, if I'd stopped till Christmas. I rather wished my Aunt Augusta hadn't been so busy, and had left my career alone, at any rate until after the Christmas holidays.

Of course my going was a godsend to

various other chaps and, though they regretted it in a way, especially the footer eleven; such a lot of things were always happening from day to day at Merivale that there was no time really to mourn. One or two wanted to club up and give me a present, but it didn't come to reality; though of course they were frightfully sorry I was going, when they had time to think about it. They were, naturally, very keen over the various things that I left behind; but of course these were all handed over to my brothers.

Then the rather solemn moment came when a cab arrived for me and I went. But everybody was in class at the time and nobody missed me. In fact, it wasn't what you might call really solemn to anybody but myself.

II

So I went to London, where, of course, I had always meant to go sooner or later. I had heard and read a great deal about this place, but had no idea that it was so remarkable as it really is. Perhaps the most extraordinary of all things in London is passing millions of people every day of your life and not knowing a single one. My Aunt Augusta met me at Paddington, and we drove to her home, where I was to stop for the time being. Her name was Miss Augusta Medwin, and she lived in a place called Cornwall Residences and was an R.B.A. It was a huge house divided into flats, and her flat was the top one of all. She was an artist, and R.B.A. stands for Royal British Artist. She had a little place leading out of her flat on to the roof of the building. This was built specially for her. It looked out on to the whole of the top of London and was a studio. The Metropolitan Rail-

way had a yard down below, where the engines got up steam before going to work in the mornings. It was, of course, a far more interesting spot than any I had ever yet met with. I had a little room in the flat, and my aunt had made it very nice and comfortable. But the engines always began to get up their steam at four o'clock in the morning, and it is a very noisy process, and it took me some time growing accustomed to the hissing noise, which was very loud. There is no real stillness and silence in London even in the most select districts. Not, I mean, like the country. My aunt had one servant called Jane. She had been married, but her husband had changed his mind and run away from her. She was old and grey and like a fowl, but very good-tempered. I told her about the engines and she said :

“ This is London.”

My aunt painted very beautiful pictures in oil colours, and also made etchings of the most exquisite workmanship. She was made R.B.A. to reward her for her great genius in her art. She hung her pictures at exhibitions and was a well-known painter, though she told me that she did not make a great deal of money. I hoped that she would

take at least half of my fifty pounds a year for letting me live with her, and assured her that I cared nothing for money; then she said we would look into that if I passed my examination. She was a good deal interested in me, and said that I had my dead mother's eyes and artist's hands. She was quite old herself, and might have been at least forty. She was not yet withered, like the very old. She wore double eyeglasses when she painted. Her expression was gloomy, but her eyes were blue and still bright. I found her very much more interesting to talk to than any other woman I had met; and I told her my great secret hope for the future.

I said :

“Some day, if things happen as I should like, I am going to be an actor. It is a very difficult and uphill course of life, I know; but still, that is what I want to be, because I have a great feeling for the stage, and I shall often and often go to a theatre at night after I have done my day's work, if you don't mind—especially tragedies.”

She didn't laugh at the idea or scoff at it but she thought that I mustn't fill my head with anything but fire insurance for the present. And of course I said that my

first thought would be to work in the office and thoroughly earn my fifty pounds, and perhaps even earn more than I was paid, and so be applauded as a clerk rather out of the common.

She took me to a tailor's shop and I was measured for a tail-coat. I also had to get a top hat, such as men wear. I was tall and thin, and when the things came I put them on, and Aunt Augusta said that the effect was good, and Jane said that I looked 'quite the man.' Aunt Augusta took me to several picture-galleries, and I went about a good deal by myself and made strange discoveries.

Many people seemed to know that I was new in London without my telling them. Once I was nearly killed, showing how easily accidents happen. I had dropped a half-penny in Oxford Street, as I crossed the road, and was naturally stopping to pick it up, when the chest of a horse came bang against me and rolled me over. Fortunately, I was not in my new clothes. It was a hansom-cab horse that had run into me, and the driver pulled him up so that the horse simply skated along on his shoes and pushed me in front of him. Neither of us was hurt. A policeman appeared, and the driver asked me

whether I thought the middle of Oxford Street was the right place for playing marbles. He meant it in an insulting way, as if I was still a boy. And I said that I had dropped a halfpenny and couldn't surely be expected to leave it in the middle of London for anybody to pick up.

The driver said that no doubt I was one of God's chosen—meaning it rudely—and the people laughed, and the policeman told us all to move on. I went down a side street and cleaned myself up as well as I could. Then I found a lavatory and washed myself and got a shoeblack to rub the mud off me. London mud is very different from all other mud, not being pure, like country mud, but adulterated with oil and tar and many other products. The shoeblack charged three-pence, so it was an expensive accident for me, besides the danger.

I passed the examination, though they didn't praise me much, or give any evidence of pleasure or surprise; and then my aunt said that she thought I ought to call on the Director of the Apollo Fire Office and thank him for his great kindness in giving her his nomination for me. The Director was out, but when he heard that I had called, he

invited me to dine with him. I had never been invited to dinner before and rather wished my aunt would come too ; but she said that she had not been asked, though she had often been there—to see Mr. Benyon Pepys and his original etchings. He followed art in his spare time, which was considerable, and my aunt had given him etching lessons, at which she was a great dab. He was also a descendant of the great Pepys of diary fame—so my aunt told me. He was a bachelor and very fond of pictures and very rich, as all Directors must be before they can rise to that high walk of life.

“ You ought to wear dress clothes,” said Aunt Augusta ; “ however, it is not vital. He will understand.”

“ You can hire ’em for a song,” declared Jane ; but my aunt decided that I should put on my new tail-coat—with a white tie.

When it came to putting on this tie, however, she didn’t care about it, and thought that I looked too much like a curate. She showed a sort of objection to curates that much surprised me ; because at Merivale there had never been any feeling against them ; in fact, quite the contrary. Many

of the masters at Merivale used to read for the Church while they taught us ; and when they had read enough, they went away and gradually became curates, as the next stage in their careers.

But Aunt Augusta didn't want me to look like one, and for that matter I didn't myself, having no feeling for the Church ; and so I put on a dark blue tie and wore my new silver watch and chain and went like that.

Mr. Benyon Pepys was a short, clean-shaved man and lived in the utmost magnificence in a house not far from Cavendish Square. Naturally, I had never seen such a house or such magnificence. It was an abode of the highest art. There were three footmen and a church organ with golden pipes in the hall alone ; and everything was done on the same scale throughout. One footman asked me my name and another took my overcoat and top-hat and hung them up on a hat-stand, of which every hat-peg was the twisted horn of an antelope ! Then the man who had asked my name threw open a door, on which were painted rare flowers—probably orchids—and announced my arrival. ‘ Mr. Corkey ! ’ he said in a deep voice.

I walked in and found Mr. Benyon Pepys and Miss Benyon Pepys sitting one on each side of a palatial mantelpiece, which was supported by the figures of naked girls in pure white marble. They both rose from their chairs as I walked down the room amid wonderful creations of art. They did not seem to realise the fact that they were surrounded by such amazing things. There were flowers and pictures in huge gold frames and statues on pedestals; and, strange to say, amid all this profusion they allowed a mere, live pug-dog with a pink bow tied round his neck! He sat on a rug, which must once have been the skin of a perfectly enormous tiger. It had glass eyes and its teeth were left in its jaws, which were red, as in life, and wide open. The pug lounged upon it, as though to the manner born.

“Well, Mr. Corker, so you’ve passed your examination and will join us next week, I hear,” said Mr. Benyon Pepys. He spoke in a light, easy—you might almost say a jaunty—tone of voice, though he was in full dress clothes and wore a gold watch-chain on a spotless white waistcoat. Miss Benyon Pepys was just as kind as him. There was not a spark

of side about either of them. They were both of great age and Mr. Pepys was of a shining and complete baldness, as well as being clean-shaved. I told him my name was Corkey, not Corker ; and he said, " Yes, yes, Corker—I know."

" And how do you like London ? " asked Miss Benyon Pepys. She was clad in some rare fabric—probably some fabulous embroidery from the Middle Ages—and richly adorned with jewels, which flashed when she moved her limbs ; but she paid no attention to them, and was indeed far more interested in the pug-dog than anything in the room.

He was called ' Peter,' and made a steady and disgusting noise, like a man snoring. He came into dinner with us, and had a light meal off a blue china plate, prepared by Miss Benyon Pepys.

I was just saying that I liked London, and had pretty well mastered Oxford Street and Edgware Road, when a deep and musical chime of bells rang out and the door was thrown open.

" Will you take my sister in to dinner ? " said Mr. Benyon Pepys ; but I was prepared for this, because Aunt Augusta had warned

me that it might happen. So I gave her my right arm, and she put the tips of her left hand fingers upon it, and I remember feeling curiously that, what with diamonds and rubies and one thing and another, her hand, small though it was, might easily have been worth many thousands of pounds.

“If the mere sister of a Director can do this sort of thing, how majestic must be the wealth of the Director himself!” I thought. In fact I very nearly said it, because it seemed to me that the idea was a great compliment and ought to have pleased them both. It would have been well meant anyway. But I found it difficult to make conversation, owing to the immense number of things all round me that had to be noticed.

As a matter of fact, I couldn't be said to take Miss Benyon Pepys in to dinner, not knowing the way. But she took me in, and it was no mere dinner, but a dazzling banquet on a table groaning with massive silver and other forms of plate. There was no tablecloth in the usual acceptation of the word; but a strip of rich fabric—probably antique tapestry from France or Turkey—spread on a polished table, which glittered and reflected in its ebony depths the wax

candles and silver and various pieces of rare workmanship arranged upon the hospitable board.

One would have thought, to see them, that a dinner of this kind—seven courses not counting dessert—was an everyday thing with the Benyon Pepys ! It may have been, for all I know. Wine flowed like water—at least, it would have done so if there had been anybody there to drink it ; but, of course, I didn't, knowing well that wine goes to the head if you're not used to it—and Miss Benyon Pepys merely drank hot water with a little tablet of some chemical that fizzed away in it—medicine, I suppose. It was sad in a way to see her pass the luxurious dishes without touching them. She little knew what she was missing. Even Mr. Benyon Pepys himself only sipped each wine in turn, with birdlike sips, but he never drank his glass quite empty. I expect the footmen dashed off what he left, doubtless tossing up among themselves which should have it.

I tried to talk at dinner, though there was little time, and once a good thing, full of rich and rare flavours, was swept away before I had finished it, because I stopped to speak.

I asked after the Pepys diaries and hoped they were successful. I said :

“ I shall, of course, keep a diary in London, and I was going to get a Raphael Tuck diary ; but I shall buy a Pepys now.”

Looking back, I don't think either of them heard this. At any rate, that night when my Aunt Augusta explained about it, I prayed to God in my prayers that they might not have heard. The footmen, however, must have.

But I made Mr. Benyon Pepys laugh with a remark which, curiously enough, was not in the least amusing nor intended to be. I said :

“ Of course, the business of a Director is to direct ? ”

Because I thought it would show a proper spirit to be interested in his great work. But he laughed, and said :

“ Not always, Mr. Corker, not always ! I am not myself a man of business ; but a connoisseur and creator. Art is my occupation. Do not, however, think that I am not exceedingly interested in the Apollo. You will find upon the face of each policy an allegorical representation of the sun-god in a chariot drawn by four horses. I cannot claim that the actual design is mine, but

the conception sprang from my brain twenty-five years ago. The creation, though severely Greek, is my own."

He explained that he had found the greatest difficulty to get anybody to accept his nomination to the Apollo Fire Office. "But fortunately," he said, "your aunt, the accomplished artist, was able to help me, and I feel under no little obligation to her—and you."

In this graceful and gentlemanly way he spoke to me. He told me that the staff was very large and included men of all ages—many brilliant and some ordinary.

"You will begin work in the Country Department," he said; "they are a bit rough-and-ready up there, I fancy, but I speak only from hearsay. Certain adventurous members of the Board have penetrated to those savage regions, though I cannot honestly say that I have ever ventured. After signing a hundred or two policies, my intellect reels and I have to totter over to Murch's for turtle-soup. It is a curious fact that turtle restores brain-fag quicker than any other form of food."

"I am glad it has such a good effect on you, sir," I said.

Miss Pepys left when the magnificent dessert was served. She never touched so much as a grape, though they were the largest I had ever seen; and after she had gone, Mr. Pepys asked me to smoke. Knowing, of course, that a cigarette is nothing on a full stomach, and also knowing that my own stomach was now perfectly adapted for it, I consented, and had a priceless box of chased silver containing rare Egyptian cigarettes handed to me by one of the footmen. With it he brought a lamp, which appeared to be—and very likely was—of solid gold. We then had coffee; and when all was over, Mr. Benyon Pepys proposed that we should again join Miss Benyon Pepys; so we returned to the drawing-room and he showed me a portfolio of his etchings. They were black and grubby and mysterious and no doubt great masterpieces, if I had only understood them. Even as it was, I rather came off over the etchings and recognised many things about them in a way that everybody didn't. At least, I gathered so from the fact that Mr. Benyon Pepys was surprised and pleased. He said that 'chiaro-oscuro' was the secret of his success, and no doubt it may have been. He praised my Aunt Augusta very

highly; and I was exceedingly glad to hear him speak so well of her great genius in her art.

At ten o'clock I got up to go, and a footman whistled at the door for a cab, and I luckily had a sixpence which I pressed into his hand as I leapt into the cab. But the effect was spoiled, because I forgot my overcoat and had to leap out again. The footman helped me into it, but didn't mention the sixpence. I dare say to him it was a thing of nought.

So I returned to Aunt Augusta's flat, and told her all about the wonders of the evening; and she was pleased and said that she hoped Mr. Benyon Pepys would some day ask me again. But no such thing happened. And, of course, there was no reason why it should. Probably they *did* hear what I said about the diary, but were too highly born and refined to take any notice.

III

THE great first day at the Apollo Fire Office soon came, and my Aunt Augusta seemed to be quite moved as, having discussed two poached eggs, a roll, butter, toast, and marmalade, and two cups of coffee, I went forth in my top-hat and tail-coat to earn my living. Women are rum. She'd worked like anything to get me this great appointment, and yet, when I started off in the best possible style to begin, Aunt Augusta seemed distinctly sniffy! I took an omnibus from Oxford Street, having previously walked down Harley Street, which is a great haunt of the medical profession. Merely to walk down it and read the names is a solemn thing to do, and makes you thank God for being pretty well.

In due course I arrived at my destination, in Threadneedle Street in the very heart of the City of London. First you come to the Bank of England—an imposing edifice quite

black with centuries of London fog—and opposite this is the Royal Exchange, whose weather-vane is a grasshopper covered with gold and of enormous size. Often and often, from the Country Department of the Apollo, I used to look up at it and long to be in the green places where real grasshoppers occur so freely.

But, to return, I walked into the Apollo, which comes next to the Bank of England, and found there was a book on the first floor of the office, in which every member of the staff had to sign his name on arriving. When the hour of ten struck, a clerk came forward, dipped his pen into the red ink, picked up a ruler and drew a line across the page. This was to separate the clerks who were in time from those who were late. If you were under the red line more than once or twice in a month, you heard about it unfavourably.

There was an amazing record of a wonderful old clerk who had worked in the office for forty-five years and never once been under the line ! But at last there came a day when the hour of ten rang out and the old clerk had not come. Everybody was very excited over it, and they actually gave him ten

minutes' grace, which was not lawful, but a sporting and a proper thing to do in my opinion. However, all was without avail; for he did not come, and the red line had to be reluctantly drawn. Everybody almost trembled to know what the old clerk would do when he arrived to find the record of forty-five years was ended; but the old clerk never did arrive, because a telegram came, a few minutes after the drawing of the line, to say that he had died in his sleep at his wife's side, and therefore could not get up at six o'clock, which was his rule. It was rather sad in a way.

To show, however, that everybody didn't feel the same rare spirit of punctuality as the old clerk, there was another interesting story of the red line and a chap who arrived late on his very first day! He actually began his official career under the red line. He must have been a man like the great Napoleon in some ways. A very self-willed sort of man, in fact. He only stopped in the Apollo a fortnight, and then was invited to seek another sphere of activity. He was a nephew of one of the Directors and died in the Zulu War. A pity for him he had not been of a clerk-like turn of mind.

I signed the book in full :

“NORMAN BRYAN CORKEY,”

and then a messenger, who wore a blue tail-coat with a glittering disc of silver on his breast, showed me up to the Country Department. It was at the very top of the edifice—a long room with desks arranged in such a way that the light from the stately windows should fall upon them. About thirty-five men of all ages pursued their avocation of making policies in this great room. The Chief had an apartment leading out of this, and usually he sat in great seclusion, pondering over the affairs of the Department. He was a big and a stout man, with a florid face and a beard and moustache of brown hair. His eyes were grey and penetrating. They roamed over the Department sometimes, when he came to the door of his own room ; and he saw instantly everything that was going on and noted it down, in a capacious memory, for future use. Everybody liked him, for he was a kind and a good and a patient man, and his ability must have been very great to have reached such a high position ; for he was much younger than many other men who were under him.

He welcomed me with friendliness and hoped I should settle down and soon take to the work.

He said :

“ Be industrious, Mr. Corkey, and let me have the pleasure of reporting favourably when the time comes to give an account of your labours to the Secretary.”

I said :

“ Yes, sir, I will do my best.”

He looked at me and smiled.

“ A great promise,” he said. “ To do your best, Mr. Corkey, is to be one man picked out of a thousand.”

I had no idea, then, that it was such a rare thing to do your best ; but he knew. And I found afterwards that it is not only rare but frightfully difficult, and no doubt that is why so few people do it.

Mr. Westonshaugh, for that was the name of this good man, called a subordinate, and a fair, pale clerk in the prime of life, with a large amber moustache and a high forehead, responded to the summons.

“ This is Mr. Corkey,” said the Chief. “ He goes into your division, Mr. Blades. I need not ask you to look after him and indicate the duties. He passed a good

examination and is quite ready to set to work."

I followed Mr. Blades and walked down the great room. There were two desks apart in one corner at which old, bald, spectacled men set, and at the other desks, already mentioned, the full strength of the Department was already busily occupied.

I found an empty desk waiting for me beside Mr. Blades, and I could see by his manner, which was kindly but penetrating, that he was considering what sort of clerk I should make. Others also looked at me. One man said 'Legs!' referring to mine, which were very long. There was a strange and helpless feeling about it all. I dimly remembered feeling just the same when I first went to Merivale. Mr. Blades called a messenger and bade him bring pens, fill the ink-bottles and fetch blotting-paper and paper-cutter, a ruler, an ink eraser, and other clerkly instruments.

"Your first duty," he said, "is to copy policies into the books. Here is a pile of policies and they are numbered in order. There are no abbreviations on the actual policy; but abbreviations are allowed in copying them into the books. This saves

many hours of time. For instance, the word 'communicating' occurs over and over again. So, in copying it, we reduce it to three letters, namely, 'com.' I will now copy a policy and you can see how I do it."

Mr. Blades was kindness itself and, indeed, from that day forward I blessed his name. He was a brick. He was fierce certainly, and if angered, as sometimes happened, would utter dreadful imprecations, such as I thought were only to be heard among pirates and other story-book people; but he had a big heart and a very heroic mind. He feared nothing and, though a small man, exhibited great courage on many occasions in his private life, of which he told me when I knew him better. He was married and lived at Bickleigh and had offspring.

I settled to the work and nothing much happened, though I had very often to refer to Mr. Blades. He never minded and was always ready with his wide knowledge, which, of course, extended far beyond the copying that I had to do. In fact, the Department teemed with men of the greatest ability, and not only did every one of them exhibit perfect mastery of the complicated

art of drawing-out of insurance policies against fire, but many of them, as I found gradually—in fact, almost every one—had some remarkable talent which was not wanted in their official tasks. Some could draw and some could play various musical instruments; some were very keen sportsmen and understood cricket and football and other branches; and some were great readers and knew all about literature. Some, again, were gardeners and cultivated most beautiful exotics, which they brought to the office to raffle from time to time. Others, again, arranged sweepstakes on horse-races and brightened up the dull routine of official life in this way. Others were volunteers and very keen about soldiering. I hoped that I might find somebody interested in the stage, but curiously enough, though many went to the theatre, none ever wanted to become professional actors.

When the luncheon interval arrived I was allowed to go out for refreshments, and I went and walked about in the City of London. But I did not go farther than the huge figures that beat time over a watchmaker's shop in Cheapside. It must have been wonderful mechanism, and I should like to

have had it explained, but there was no time to go into the shop. And, in any case, I shouldn't have had the cheek to ask. By a funny chance, near the Royal Exchange I found the identical Murch's shop, where Mr. Benyon Pepys used to go and have turtle soup after the labours of signing policies; so I thought that if it suited him so well, it might suit me also. With great presence of mind, however, I first asked the price of a plate, and on hearing it, made some hurried excuse and went back into the street. Turtle soup is out of the question for beginners in the City of London. I had a bath bun and a glass of milk instead and then went back to work.

It was after returning that the first thing that I really understood and enjoyed happened at the Apollo. Up till then I felt rather small and helpless and strange. Here was I, like an ant in a nest, but I felt a fool of an ant—good for nothing but to make mistakes and worry Mr. Blades. The huge whirl and rush of business dazed me. I almost heard the thunder of machinery; but I knew really that all the machinery was going on inside the heads of those thirty-five able and industrious men. I ex-

pected that they were working for their wives and children and their old, infirm mothers and so on. It was real grim life. It is true there were a few boys there besides me; but they also were able and industrious, if not brilliant, and they were all doing their part in the great machine. Even the messengers were. They were nearly all old, brave, wounded soldiers. I felt the solemnity. I seemed like a mere insect in a solemn cathedral where a mighty service was going on and everybody was doing their appointed part but me. I had spoiled several large sheets of paper and felt a sort of sick feeling that I was not earning my fifty pounds a year, and should soon be told so. I made a calculation on my blotting-paper to see how much money I ought to earn each day. The amount discouraged me and, besides that, I had another sort of animal feeling that I wasn't getting enough air to breathe. Then, in this dark and despairing moment, there happened a thing that bucked me up and put new life into me. Suddenly I got a terrific smack on the side of the face, and an orange, about half sucked, fell from my cheek upon the page spread before me. It was like a pleasant breath of Merivale.

I understood it ; I knew how to handle it. For a moment I no longer felt like an insect in some vast cathedral. I was deeply interested and hoped that the man who could do a thing of this sort in a solemn scene like the Country Department of the Apollo Fire Office, might be a real friend to me. It happened that, as I came back from lunching, I had seen a young man with the lid of his desk raised. His head was inside and he was sucking this identical orange that had now hit me in the face. I felt at the time that the man who could suck an orange in the midst of this booming hive of industry must be out of the common. And so he proved to be. He was dark and clean-shaved, with broad shoulders and a purple chin. I knew, therefore, when the orange arrived, who had chucked it, and could not help feeling the purple-chinned young man was a jolly good shot, whatever else he might be. I laughed when the orange hit me, and looked over to him ; but he was writing very busily and not a muscle moved. I didn't dare chuck the half-sucked orange back, for fear of making a boss shot, the consequences of which might have been very serious, because at least three men of considerable

age, and one grey, sat between us. So I picked up the orange and got off my stool.

"Sit down ! don't take any notice," said Mr. Blades, who was trying not to laugh and failing ; but I felt that perhaps he didn't quite understand a thing like this, having passed the stage for it and being married and so on ; whereas no doubt the purple-chinned young man, if he could chuck an orange, could also get it back without taking it in the wrong spirit.

A good many chaps watched me and some thought I was going to take the orange into Mr. Westonsaugh ; but I just went casually up the room, and when I got to the purple-chinned young man, who was writing away like mad, I stopped and turned suddenly.

"A ripping shot," I said. "I funk'd flinging it back for fear of hitting the wrong man."

Then I squashed down the orange hard on the purple-chinned young man's head and hooked back to my desk.

"You long-legged young devil !" he shouted, but he wasn't angry, only surprised. There was rather a row then, because a good many chaps laughed out loud and Mr. Westonsaugh came to his door.

“Not so much noise, gentlemen, please,” he said, and then went in again.

Half an hour afterwards the purple-chinned young man, whose name was Dicky Travers, came up to my desk.

“It’s all right,” he began. “It was a fair score; but how the devil did you know that I threw it? I’ll swear you didn’t see me.”

“I didn’t,” I admitted; “but when I came in from lunch you were sucking it with your head in your desk, so I guessed.”

That man turned out one of my very best and dearest friends in the Apollo Fire Office! He proved to be an athlete of world-wide fame and a member of the London Athletic Club. He had won countless trophies and cups and clocks and cellarettes and salad bowls, and was simply tired of seeing his name in print. He was a champion walker and had on several occasions walked seven miles inside an hour; and two miles in fifteen minutes was mere fun to him!

So ended my first day of work. At four o’clock a good number of the clerks prepared to leave and Mr. Blades told me that I could go. Of course I thanked him very much for all his kindness during the day.

“ That’s all right,” he said ; “ and to-morrow bring an office coat with you and keep that swagger one for out of doors. Let it be a dark colour—in fact, black for choice. It’s better form. And to-morrow I will show you how you can keep your cuffs clean by putting paper over them. Now you put your work into your desk and lock it up and go home. You have made a very decent start.”

I thanked him again and cleared out.

I walked back and spent a very interesting hour looking into the shops and so on. There was a place in High Holborn full of models of steam engines, and I rather longed for one. But it cost three pounds. Besides, I was now, of course, past childish things and thought no more of it. I stopped, too, to see some Blue Coat boys playing ‘ footer ’ in a playground that was railed off from the street by lofty railings. It was somewhere near the General Post Office, I believe. Some of the chaps, despite their long coats, which they strapped round their waists, played jolly well. I felt it would have been fine to have gone in and had a kick about. But, of course, the days for that were past. It was rather sad in a way. But, there it

was—I'd grown up. I had to keep reminding myself of this, and now and then my beastly top-hat fell off and reminded me again. Only it takes a bit of time to realise such a thing. In fact, I've heard grey-haired men say that they don't feel a bit old, though they may be simply fossils really, to the critical eye; so, no doubt, it was natural even for me not to *feel* that I had grown up, and had now got to face things and run my own show, as well as I could, for evermore. To rub it in, as it were, I had my first shave on the way home. Mr. Blades had advised this course.

Aunt Augusta showed a great deal of interest in the day's adventures, and next morning I took a dark blue 'blazer' to the office. It had the badge of Merivale first footer team on it; but, of course, I made my aunt cut that off. Because, though it meant a good deal at Merivale, to a man earning his own living in a hive of industry, it simply counted for nothing at all.

IV

WHEN I heard that there was a cricket club in connection with the Apollo Fire Office I was glad, and still more so when I found that the team played other Fire Offices ; for the Apollo is by no means the only one in London, though easily the best. Of course I never thought that in an office full of grown men I should be able to play in matches ; but Dicky Travers explained to me that I might hope, if I was any good, as only a comparatively small number of the clerks actually played, though a large number patronised the games with their presence and came to the Annual Dinner at the far-famed Holborn Restaurant. This restaurant, I may say, is almost a palace in itself, and the walls are decorated with sumptuous marbles and works of foreign art. The waiters are also foreign. There are fountains and a band to play while you eat ; and it shows how accustomed the London mind can get to almost

FROM THE ANGLE

anything in the way of luxury, for I have seen people eating through brilliant masterpieces of music and not in the least put off their food by them, though every instrument in the band was playing simultaneously. But, of course, there were no bands or fountains where I went for my bath bun and glass of milk. As a matter of fact, this was rather a light meal for me, but I hoped to get accustomed to it. Anyway the result, when dinner-time came at the flat of my Aunt Augusta, was remarkably good, and I used to eat in a way that filled her with fear. And, after eating, I felt that I simply must have exercise of some sort, and I used to go out in the dark to the Regent's Park and run for miles at my best pace. It worried policemen when I flew past them, because it is very unusual to race about after dark in London if you are honest, and policemen are, unfortunately, a suspicious race and, owing to their work, get into the way of thinking that anything out of the common may be a clue. Once having flown past a policeman and run without stopping to a certain lamp-post, I went back to the man and explained to him that I had to sit on an office stool most of the day, and that at night, after dinner, I

felt a frightful need for active exercise, and so took it in this way. I thought he would rather applaud the idea, but he said it was a fool's game and might lead to trouble if I persisted in it. He advised me to join an athletic club and a gymnasium, and I told him that the advice was good and thanked him. As a matter of fact, I was able to tell the policeman also that a great friend of mine had put me up for the London Athletic Club, and that I hoped soon to hear that I had been elected as a member. I mentioned Dicky Travers and thought the policeman would be a good deal surprised that I actually knew this famous man. However, the surprise was mine, because the policeman had never heard of him. But sport was a sealed book to him, as the saying is.

I only remember one other thing about those runs. I used to put on very little clothes, of course, but even so, naturally worked myself up into a terrific perspiration, which was what I meant to do, it being a most healthful thing for people who have to sit still all day. But my aunt was quite alarmed when I returned to have a bath and a rub down; and then it came out that she had never seen anybody in a real perspiration

before ! I roared with laughter and explained, and she said that she thought people only had perspirations when they were ill. She had never been in one in her whole life apparently. She was a very nice and kind woman, but I puzzled her fearfully, because she had never known many boys of my age, and though she smoked cigarettes herself, she thought they were bad for me and begged me to be very temperate in the use of them. To be temperate in everything was a mania with her. I must have upset her flat a lot one way and another ; but she was very patient and wouldn't hear of my going into lodgings alone.

" You are much too young," she said. " You must look upon me as your mother till you are eighteen, at any rate."

Then it was—after I had been in the City of London six weeks—that I met with my first great misfortune, though it began as a most hopeful and promising affair.

I had heard, of course, from Dicky Travers and Mr. Blades and others, that there were plenty of shady characters in London, and that their shadiness took all sorts of forms ; but this did not bother me much, because a clerk such as I was would not, I thought,

provoke a shady character, owing to my youth. But a good many of these shady characters mark down young men as their regular and lawful prey, like the tiger marks down the bison in the jungle. And a great feature of the cunning of these people is that they get themselves up in a way to hide their real natures—in fact, such is their ingenuity, that they pretend to go to the other extreme, and appear before their victims dressed just the very opposite of what one would expect in a shady character. They are, in fact, full of deceit.

One day I had eaten my bun and drunk my glass of milk in about a second and a half, and was looking at books in a very interesting bookseller's window that spread out into the street near that historic building known as the Mansion House, where the Lord Mayor lives. I had found a sixpenny book about Mr. Henry Irving's art and was just going to purchase it, bringing from my pocket a five-pound note to do so, when an old man of a religious and gentlemanly appearance spoke to me.

But first, to calm the natural excitement of the reader at hearing me mention a five-pound note, I ought to explain that that

morning was pay-day at the office—the first in which I had actively participated. The five-pound note was the first that I had ever earned, and it gave me a great deal of satisfaction to feel it in my pocket. This was natural.

“Good literature here, sir,” said the stranger. “I hope you love books?”

“Yes, I do,” I answered, concealing my five pounds instantly.

“I write books,” he told me. “I dare say my name is familiar enough to you, if you are a reader of poetry.”

I looked at him and saw that he had a long grey beard and red rims to his eyes. His clothes were black and had seen better days. He wore rather a low waistcoat which was touched here and there with grease; but his shirt was fairly white, and through his beard I saw a black tie under his chin. He was tall, and carried an umbrella and a black and rather tattered bag of leather. I seemed to feel that his black bag was heavy with great poetry. It was a solemn moment for me.

“I’m afraid I’m not much of a hand at poetry, sir,” I said. “At school one had a lot to learn, and now I’m rather off it—excepting Shakespeare.”

“You City men don’t know what you are missing,” he answered. “I have just come from Paternoster Row, where I have been arranging with a great publisher—one of the greatest, in fact—for my next volume of poems. Strangely enough, I saw you handle a book of mine on this bookstall only a few moments ago, and I felt drawn to you.”

“Then you are Mr. Martin Tupper!” I exclaimed, “for I picked up a book of his just now—though only to see what was under it, I am afraid.”

He felt disappointed at this, but admitted that I was right in my suspicion.

“I am Tupper,” he confessed; “and, though perhaps nobody in the world has more unknown friends, yet I allow myself no intimates. It is owing to my terribly sensitive genius. I read men like books. That is why I am talking to you at this moment. My knowledge of human nature is such that I can see at a glance—I can almost feel—whether a fellow-creature is predisposed towards me or not.”

“It is a great honour to speak to you, Mr. Martin Tupper,” I answered. “But I’m afraid a man like me—just a clerk in a noisy and booming hive of industry—

wouldn't be any good to you as a friend. I don't know much about anything—in fact, I am nobody, really; though I hope some day to be somebody.”

“I felt sure of that,” he answered. “Your reply pleases me very much, young man, because it indicates that you are modest but also plucky. You recognise that you have as yet done nothing, but your heart is high and you look forward to a time when you will do everything. Had you read my *Proverbial Philosophy*, you would have discovered that—however, you must read it—to please me. You must let me send you a copy from the author.”

I was, of course, greatly surprised at such unexpected kindness, but there was more to come.

“When I find a young and promising man studying the books upon this stall between the hours of one and two o'clock,” said Mr. Tupper, “my custom is to ask him to join me at a modest meal—luncheon, in fact. Now do not say that you have lunched, or you will greatly disappoint me.”

Of course I had lunched, and yet, in a manner of speaking, I hadn't—not as a man of world-wide fame would understand the word. To

tell the truth, I had felt from the first that it was rather sad in a way—having to subsist on a bath bun and a glass of milk for so many hours ; and I knew that I never should get to feel it was a complete meal. So when this good and celebrated man offered me a luncheon, I felt, if not perfectly true, yet it was true enough and not really dishonest to say that I had not lunched. So I said it, and he was evidently very glad.

“ We will go to the ‘ Cat on Hot Bricks,’ ” he told me. “ It is an eating-house of no pretension, but I prefer the greatest simplicity in all my ways, including my food and drink. At the big restaurants I should be recognised, which is a source of annoyance to me ; but I am unknown at the ‘ Cat on Hot Bricks,’ and I often take my steak or chop and a pint of light ale there, with other celebrities, and study life. Ah ! the study of life, my young friend, is the prince of pursuits ! The name that I have made is based entirely upon that study. Long practice has enabled me to see in a moment the constituents of every character and know at a glance with whom I have to deal.”

I told him my name, and he said that he had had the pleasure to meet some of the

elder members of my family in the far past. I ventured to tell him about Aunt Augusta and her paintings, and he said that they were well known to him and that he possessed a good example of her genius. He even promised to call upon her when next in that part of London. He was immensely interested in my work and asked me many questions concerning fire insurance. And then I told him that I hoped in course of time to be an actor, and he said that, next to the poet, the actor was often the greatest influence for good. He himself had written a play, but he shrank from submitting it to a theatrical manager for production. It was a highly poetical play and made of the purest poetry, and so delicate that he feared that actors and actresses, unless they were the most famous in London, might go and rub the bloom off it and spoil it.

He let me choose what I liked for luncheon, and I chose steak-and-kidney pie and ginger beer. He then told me that the steak-and-kidney pie was all right, but that the only profits made at the 'Cat on Hot Bricks' arose from the liquid refreshment, and that it would not be kind or considerate to drink so cheap a drink as ginger beer. So he

ordered two bottles of proper beer, and then he told me about the place and its ways.

“The Bishop of London often comes here—just for quiet,” he said. “Of course I know him, and we have a chat sometimes, about religion and poetry and so on. And the Dean of St. Paul’s will drop in now and then. He has a weakness for ‘lark pudding’—a very famous dish here. They have it on Wednesdays only. Now tell me about your theatrical ambitions, for I may be able to help you in that matter.”

I told him all about my hopes, and he said that one of his few personal friends was Mr. Wilson Barrett, of the Princess’s Theatre in Oxford Street.

“That great genius, Mr. Booth, from America, has been acting Shakespeare there lately,” I said.

“He has,” answered Mr. Tupper; “his ‘Lear’ is stupendous. I know him well, for he often recites my poems at benefit matinees. But Wilson” (in this amazingly familiar way he referred to the great Mr. Wilson Barrett) “is always on the look-out for promising young fellows to join his company, and walk on with the crowds, and so learn the rudiments of stage education and become familiar

with the boards. He is anxious to get a superior set of young fellows on to the stage, and he often comes to me, because he knows that in the circles wherein I move the young men are intellectual and have high opinions about the honour of the actor's calling."

"It would be a glorious beginning for a young man," I said, "but, of course, such good things are not for me."

Mr. Tupper appeared to be buried in his own thoughts for a time. When he spoke again, he had changed the subject.

"Will you have another plate of steak-and-kidney pie?" he asked, and I consented with many thanks.

Then he returned to the great subject of the stage.

"Only yesterday," he said, "I was spending half an hour in dear old Wilson's private room at the Princess's Theatre. He likes me to drop in between the acts. He is a man who would always rather listen than talk; and, if he has to talk, he chooses any subject rather than himself and his histrionic powers. All the greatest actors are the same. They are almost morbid about mentioning their personal talents, or the parts they have played. But the subjects that always interest Wilson

are the younger men and the future of the drama. ‘Martin,’ he said to me, ‘I would throw up the lead in my own theatre to-night, if I could by so doing reveal a new and great genius to the world! I would gladly play subordinate parts, if I could find a young man to play my parts better than I do myself.’ I tell you this, Mr. Corkey, to show you that one supreme artist, at least, is always on the look-out for talent, always ready to stretch a helping hand to the tyro.”

“Perhaps some day,” I said, “years hence, of course, when I have learned elocution and stage deportment and got the general hang of the thing, you would be so very generous and kind as to give me a letter of introduction to Mr. Barrett?”

Mr. Tupper filled my glass with more beer and sank his voice to a confidential whisper.

“I couldn’t ‘give’ you an introduction, Mr. Corkey, because Wilson himself would not allow that. I am, of course, enormously rich, but it is always understood between me and the great tragedian that I get some little honorarium for these introductions. Personally, I do not want any such thing; but he feels that a nominal sum of three to five guineas ought to pass before young fellows

are lifted to the immense privilege of his personal acquaintance, and enabled actually to tread the boards with him in some of his most impassioned creations. The money I give to the Home for Decayed Gentlewomen at Newington Butts—in which I am deeply interested. Thus, you see, these introductions to Mr. Wilson Barrett serve two great ends: they advance the cause of the Decayed Gentlewomen—the number of whom would much distress you to learn—and they enable the aspirant to theatrical honours to begin his career under the most promising circumstances that it is possible to conceive.”

“But I ought to go through the mill, like Mr. Barrett himself and Mr. Henry Irving and all famous actors have done,” I said; and Mr. Tupper agreed with me.

“Have no fear for that,” he answered. “Wilson will see to that. He is more than strict and, while allowing reasonable freedom for the expansion of individual genius, will take very good care you have severe training and plenty of hard work. But the point is that you must go through his mill and not another’s. It is no good going to Wilson after some lesser man has taught you to speak and walk and act. You would only

have to unlearn these things. If you want to flourish in his school of tragedy, which is, of course, the most famous in England at the moment, you must go to him, as it were, empty—a blank sheet—a virgin page whereon he can impress his great principles. Will you have apple tart, plum tart, or tapioca pudding and Surrey cream ? ”

I took apple tart, but Mr. Tupper said that sweet dishes were fatal to the working of his mind in poetical invention, so he had celery and cheese.

“ I see Wilson to-night,” he resumed. “ To be quite frank, I have to tell him about a lad who is very anxious to join him, and wishes to give me fifty pounds for the introduction ; but such is my strange gift of intuition in these cases, that I would far rather introduce you to the theatre than the youth in question. You are clearly in earnest and I doubt if he is. You have a theatrical personality and he has not. Your voice is well suited for the higher drama ; his is a cockney voice and will always place him at a disadvantage save in comedy. Had it been in your power to go before Wilson this week, I should have substituted your name for the other. I wish cordially there were no

sordid question of money. I would even advance you five guineas myself. But you are as delicate-minded as I am. You would not like me to do that."

I assured him that such a thing was out of the question.

"Indeed, Mr. Tupper," I said, "you are doing far, far more than I should ever have thought anybody would do for a perfect stranger. And unless I could pay the money for the decayed Home, I should not dream of accepting such a great kindness."

He was quite touched. He blew his nose.

"We artists," he said, "are emotional. There is a magic power in us to find all that is trusting and good and of sweet savour in human nature. And yet goodness and gratitude and proper feeling in the young always move me, as you see me moved now. They are so rare."

He brought out a brown leather purse and took from it half a sovereign. He then called the waiter and paid the bill.

"We will go down into the smoking-room," he said. "No doubt a liqueur will not be amiss."

I'd forgotten all about the time and, in fact, everything else in the world during this

fearfully exciting meeting with Mr. Martin Tupper; and the end of it all was that I fished out my first five-pound note for the introduction to Mr. Barrett and my first step on the stage.

“It should be guineas,” said Mr. Tupper, “but in your case, and because I have taken a very great personal fancy to you, it shall be pounds. And don’t grudge the money. Go on your way happy in the knowledge that it will greatly gladden a life that has a distinctly seamy side. There is a sad but courageous woman whose eyes will brighten when she sees this piece of paper.”

But though he idly threw my note into his pocket as a thing of no account, yet he was a man of the most honourable and sensitive nature.

“I cannot,” he said, “leave you without carrying out my part of the contract. I gather that you are rather pressed for time, or I would drive you to the Princess’s Theatre in my private brougham, which is waiting for me near the Mansion House. No doubt the driver thinks I am lunching with the Lord Mayor, as I often do. But to take you just now to the Princess’s Theatre would interfere with your duties at the Apollo Fire

Office, which I should be the last to wish to do ; so I will write you a personal introduction to my dear friend, Mr. Barrett, and you can deliver it, either to-night or on the next occasion that you go to see him act."

"It will be to-night," I said.

He refused to go until his part was done.

"We must avoid even the appearance of evil," he told me. "You might feel uneasy and suspicious were I to leave you with nothing but a promise. Martin Tupper's word is as good as his oath, I believe ; but it is a hard, a cold, and a cruel world. At any rate, you shall have the letter."

He opened his bag, which contained writing materials, and he had soon written a note to Mr. Barrett, warmly commending me to the attention of that great man. He made me read it, and I was surprised how well he had summed up my character. He next gave me his own address, which was No. 96 Grosvenor Square—one of the most fashionable residential neighbourhoods in London—and then, hoping that I would dine with him and Mrs. Tupper two nights later, at 8 o'clock, he shook me warmly by the hand, wished me good luck, and left me.

I saw his dignified figure steal into the

street, and though the general public did not seem to recognise him in his modest attire, I fancy that a policeman or two cast understanding glances at him. No doubt they had seen him before—at royal or other functions.

I seemed to be walking on air when I went back to work, for this great man, inspired by nothing but pure goodwill, had, as it were, opened the door of success to me and given me a chance for which thousands and thousands of young professional actors must have sighed in vain. He was hardly the man I should have chosen to know; but now that I did know him, I felt that it must have been a special Providence that had done it. I wished that I could make it up to him and hoped that he would live long enough for me to send him free tickets to see me act. Meantime, I determined to buy all his books, which was the least I could do.

But I was brought down to earth rather rudely from these beautiful thoughts, for when I got back to the office, Mr. Blades told me that Mr. Westonshaugh wished to speak to me; and it then transpired that, instead of taking half an hour for my luncheon, according to the rules and regulations of the

Apollo, I had been out for two hours and rather more !

I was terribly sorry, and felt the right and proper thing was to be quite plain with Mr. Westonshaugh.

“ I met Mr. Martin Tupper at a bookstall, and he introduced himself and asked me to lunch, sir,” I said. But the Head of the Department did not like this at all, and I was a good deal distressed to find the spirit in which he took it. He seemed pained and startled by what I told him ; he even showed a great disinclination to accept my word.

“ Go back to your work, sir,” he said, in a very stern voice, “ and don’t add buffoonery to your other irregularities. I am much disappointed in you, Mr. Corkey.”

It was a fearful thing to hear this great and good man misunderstand me so completely. In fact, the blood of shame sprang to my forehead—a thing that had never happened before. And then he made another even more terrible speech.

“ You look to me very much as if you’d been drinking,” he said. “ Have a care, young man ; for if there is one thing that will ruin your future more quickly than another, it is that disgusting offence ! ”

I sneaked away then, in a state of bewildered grief, sorrowful repentance, and mournful exasperation. This was by far the unhappiest event in my life ; and things got worse and worse as the day wore on.

Mr. Blades asked me what the deuce I'd been doing, and when I told him, he said ' Rats ! ' This was a word he used to mean scorn. Then he continued, and even used French.

" ' Martin Tupper ! ' Why don't you say it was Martin Luther at once ? I believe it's a case of ' Sasshay la fam ! ' "

" Martin Luther died in 1546, so it couldn't have been him, and I don't know what ' Sasshay la fam ' means," I said, and Mr. Blades replied in a most startling manner :

" So's Martin Tupper dead—sure to be ! Ages ago, no doubt. Anyway, I happen to know that Mr. Westonsaugh thinks the dickens of a lot of him, so when you said he'd been standing you a lunch, you made the worst joke you could have."

" It wasn't a joke, but quite the reverse," I said ; and then I told Mr. Blades how I had an introduction to Mr. Wilson Barrett at that moment in my pocket—to prove the truth of what I was saying.

Mr. Blades read it carefully and shook his head.

“ You’re such a jug, Corkey,” he said. “ This is neither more nor less than a common or garden confidence trick. The beggar saw you had a ‘ fiver ’ at the bookstall and soon found you were a soft thing. Then he pretended to be friendly and just hammered away till he found the weak spot. If you’d go and have a sensible lunch, like everybody else, instead of wandering about London in the helpless way you do, on a bun and a glass of milk, this wouldn’t have happened.”

“ The great point is whether Mr. Tupper is or is not dead,” I told Mr. Blades. “ If he is dead, really and truly, then no doubt I have been swindled by a shady character ; but if he is not, then there is still hope that it was really him.”

Mr. Blades, with his accustomed great kindness, himself went in to Mr. Westonsaugh with me and explained the painful situation in some well-chosen words.

“ I shouldn’t have thought of using the name of such a world-renowned poet, sir,” I said to the Head of the Department ; “ but he told me so himself, and he was exceedingly serious-looking and solemn and

kind; and far above clean clothes—which is a common thing with poets. But, of course, if he's dead, as Mr. Blades thinks——”

“He's not dead,” answered the Chief. “I am glad to say that he is not dead. It is my privilege to correspond with Mr. Tupper occasionally. I heard from him on the subject of a difficult passage in one of his poems only a month ago.”

“Does he live in Grosvenor Square, sir?” I asked; “because this Mr. Tupper said he did—at No. 96.”

“He does not,” answered Mr. Westonsaugh. “He doesn't live in London at all.”

Then Mr. Blades had a brilliant idea.

“Would you know Mr. Tupper's handwriting, sir?” he asked, and Mr. Westonsaugh said that he would know it instantly.

He examined the letter of introduction to Mr. Barrett, and pronounced it to be an unquestionable forgery.

“A great crime has been committed,” he said. “A professional thief has used the name and signature of Mr. Tupper in order to rob you of five pounds, and he has succeeded only too well. Let this be a lesson to you, Mr. Corkey, not again to fall into

conversation with the first well-dressed—or badly dressed—stranger who may accost you. To think that the insolent scoundrel dared to use that sacred name ! ”

Mr. Westonshaugh evidently considered it a very much worse thing to forge Martin Tupper’s name than to steal my five-pound note. And I dare say it was. He forgave me, however, and withdrew his dreadful hint about my having had too much to drink.

Then I left him and worked in a very miserable frame of mind until six o’clock—to make up for my wasted time.

It was my earliest great and complete crusher ; and, coming just at this critical moment, made it simply beastly sad. Because my very first earnings were completely swallowed up in this nefarious manner by a shady customer. I had hoped to return home and flourish my five-pound note in the face of Aunt Augusta and tell her to help herself liberally out of it ; but, instead of that, I had to horrify her with the bad news that my money was gone for ever. If it had happened later, I believe that I should have made less and even felt less of it ; but such fearful luck falling on my very first ‘ fiver ’ made it undoubtedly harder to bear than it

otherwise would have been. And then I got a sort of gloomy idea that losing my first honest earnings meant a sort of curse on everything I might make in after life! I felt that a bad start like that might dog me for years, if not for ever. I had a curious and horrid dread that I should never really make up this great loss, but always be five pounds short through the rest of my career to my dying day!

Aunt Augusta tried hard to make light of it. In fact, it is undoubtedly at times like this that a woman is far more comforting than a man. She went to her private store and brought out another crisp and clean five-pound note and made me take it. She insisted, and so reluctantly I took it; but I didn't spend it in the least with the joy and ease that I should have spent the other. It was, in fact, merely a gift—good enough in its way—but very different from the one I had earned, single-handed, by hard work, in a humming hive of industry.

The whole thing had its funny side—to other people, and I heard a good deal about it at the Apollo Fire Office. In fact, I must have done the real Martin Tupper a good turn in a way, because it was the fashion for

everybody to quote from his improving works when I passed by.

It was a great lesson all round ; but London is full of interesting things of this sort.

V

I WAS too much hurt about the insult offered to Mr. Wilson Barrett and myself to go and see him act again for a long time ; but other theatres demanded my attention, because I was now a regular student of the drama and didn't like to miss anything. Sometimes I went alone and sometimes I got a clerk from the Apollo to go with me. But none of them much cared about legitimate drama.

I was already deeply in love, in a far-distant and hopeless sort of way, with Miss Ellen Terry, and when there came a first night at the Lyceum Theatre, I resolved to be present in the pit. I told Aunt Augusta not to expect me at dinner-time, but she was well used to this and said she wouldn't. So the moment that I was free from my appointed task I flew off to the Lyceum pit door and took my place. I was, however, by no means the first to arrive. A crowd had already

collected and I found myself among that hardy and famous race of men and women known as 'first-nighters.' There were even youngish girls in the crowd, for one stood near me reading the *Merchant of Venice*, which was the play we had all come to see. Luckily for the girl a gas-lamp hung over her head and she was thus enabled to read the play and pass the time. Like a fool I had brought nothing, yet it was enough amusement and instruction for me to be among so many regular professional 'first-nighters'; and I listened with great interest to their deep knowledge of the subject. Five or six men of all ages evidently knew one another, and they were talking about a little book that had just been written on Mr. Henry Irving by Mr. William Archer. It was a very startling book—the very one, in fact, that I was going to buy at the bookstall when the shady customer pretended he was Mr. Martin Tupper. It was a small book with rather a grim picture of Mr. Henry Irving on the outside, and I found that these old hands of the stage did not altogether approve of the book and thought parts of it rather strong coming from Mr. Archer to Mr. Irving.

"He says that Irving is half a woman,"

said a grey man. "Now that's going too far, in my opinion."

"I know what he's driving at," answered a young man with a very intellectual face. "You see, every artist has got to be man, woman, and child rolled into one. Every great artist has to have the imagination and power of feeling and fellow-feeling to identify himself with every other sort of possible person. If you can't do that, you can't be a first-class actor. That's where Irving beats Barrett into a cocked hat—temperament and power of imagination. Irving could act anything—from Richard the Third to an infant in arms; Barrett could not."

"Barrett very nearly made Hamlet an infant in arms, all the same," said the grey man, and at this excellent and subtle joke they all laughed. I wanted to laugh in an admiring sort of way, but doubted whether it would not be rather interfering. So I contented myself with smiling heartily; because I didn't want them to think so fine a joke had been lost upon me.

They were very deeply read in everything to do with the theatre, and I found that they knew most of the actresses by their married

names, which, of course, I did not. Thus, greatly to my surprise, I found out that nearly all the most fascinating and famous actresses were married. Many even had families.

Splendid stories were told by the grey man. He related a great jest about Mr. William Terriss when he was acting with Mr. Irving. It was irreverent in a way to such a famous actor as Mr. Terriss ; but, of course, for mere intellectual power Mr. Terriss was not in it with Mr. Irving—any more than any other actor was, though he might, none the less, be very great in himself. And once, when Mr. Terriss was rehearsing with Mr. Irving, the latter, failing to make the former do what he wanted, said before the actors, actresses, and supernumeraries at that time assembled on the spacious boards of the Lyceum Theatre—he said, “My dear Terriss, do try and use the little brains that God has given you !”

The hours rolled by and one or two of the young men spoke kindly to me. Then the girl, who had grey eyes and a mass of yellow hair under a deer-stalker hat, and was dressed in cloth of the same kind, also spoke to me and asked me to take my

elbow out of her shoulder-blade. I apologised instantly and altered my position. The crush was now increasing and the air was exceedingly stuffy ; but there still remained an hour before the doors opened.

Having broken the ice, the girl, who I think was tired of keeping quiet for such a long time, began to talk. We discussed the drama and ‘ first nights ’ in general. From one thing we went to another and I found, much to my interest, that the girl intended to become an actress. She was an independent and courageous sort of girl. Her parents had a shop in the Edgware Road and were very much against her going on the stage ; but she was determined to defy them. There was to be a dramatic school opened shortly, and she was going to join it. Then I naturally told her that I was going to join that school too, and she was quite pleased.

“ Perhaps we shall play parts in the same play some day,” she said ; and I said I hoped we might.

“ Phew ! ” she exclaimed presently. “ This is getting a bit thick, isn’t it ? ”

Certainly it was. I had never been in such a tightly packed crowd and, as bad luck

would have it, I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. I was, in plain words, starving. Like a fool I had spared no time for tea, but rushed off at the earliest possible moment, and now I began to feel emptier than I had ever felt in my life before.

The girl, to whom I mentioned this, said that I had gone white as chalk, but that I should be able to buy something to eat and drink inside. She had some chocolate in her pocket, fortunately, and with great generosity insisted upon sharing it with me; but it amounted really to nothing in my ravenous state. It was like giving a hungry tiger a shrimp.

And then a most extraordinary thing happened—a thing that I should not have believed possible. I began to feel funnier and funnier, and to gasp in a very fishlike way, and to feel a cold and horrid sweat bursting out upon my forehead. I had not felt like this for many, many years—in fact, only once before: on the day that I and Jackson Minor found a cigar at Merivale and tossed for it and I won and smoked the cigar secretly to the stump. And I remembered now, with tragical horror, what happened afterwards; and the hideous

thought came to me that I was going to be ill in that seething crowd of hardy old 'first-nighters' ! Think of the disgrace and shame of it ; and it wasn't only that, because, of course, the 'first-nighters' would never forget a horrible adventure of that kind, and no doubt the next time I presented myself among them, to wait five or six hours before the doors opened upon some great triumph of Thespian art, they would recognise me and band together against me and order me away, as a man unfit to take his place among seasoned critics of the drama.

All this and much more flashed through my head and then, just before the climax, there came the comforting thought that I couldn't be ill in that way, having had nothing since my bun and glass of milk eight hours before. I am sorry to keep on mentioning this bun and glass of milk, because it sounds greedy, but for once in a way I was glad that I was empty—for the sake of all those artistic and courageous 'first-nighters,' not to mention the brave, grey-eyed girl.

Then I felt my knees give and the gaslight overhead whirled about like a comet with twenty tails ; I saw the heads of the people

round me fade off their shoulders ; the gas-light went out ; I heard a tremendous humming and roaring in my ears, like a train in a tunnel, and all was over. My last thought was that this was death, and I wondered if Miss Ellen Terry would read about it in the paper next day and be sorry. But, even at that ghastly moment, I knew she wouldn't, because of course she would want to hear what the critics thought of her 'Portia' ; and that would naturally be the principal thing in the newspaper for her.

Of course I wasn't dying really ; but I fainted and must have put a great many people to fearful inconvenience. It shows, however, what jolly good hearts 'first-nighters' have got, in my opinion, that they didn't merely let me sink to the earth, and ignore me, and walk over me when the doors opened. But far from that, despite the length of my legs, they lugged me out somehow and forced open the side door of a public-house that was close at hand, and thrust me in.

When I came to, my first instinct was one of pure self-preservation and I asked for food. Outside, the people were crushing into the

pit of the theatre, and by the time I had eaten about a loaf and half a Dutch cheese, and drunk some weak brandy-and-water, which the landlord of the public-house very kindly and humanely insisted upon my doing, the pit was full—not even standing room remained. It was rather sad in a way; but I felt less for the frightful disappointment, after waiting all those hours, than for the debt I owed the merciful men who had rescued me. Of course I didn't know who they might be and, in any case, it was impossible to wait there till midnight, on the off-chance of seeing them after the play was over and thanking them gratefully.

I could have kicked myself over it, because for a chap nearly six feet high, about to join the London Athletic Club and going to be an actor some day and so on—for such a chap, with his way to make in the world, to go into a crowd and faint, like a footling schoolgirl who cuts her finger—it was right bang off, as they say. I felt fearfully downcast about it, because it looked to me as if my career might just as well be closed there and then: but the kind landlord rather cheered me up. He said:

“ You needn’t take on like that. No doubt you’ve outgrown your strength. It’s nothing at all. The air out there in these crushes would choke a crow. It’s the commonest thing in the world for people to be dragged out and shot in that door.”

“ Women, I dare say—not men.”

“ Women—and boys,” he answered. “ And what d’you call yourself ? ”

“ Well, I’m a man, I suppose,” I replied. “ I’m earning my own living, anyway.”

“ So did I—afore I was ten years old, my bold hero ! ” said the landlord.

He talked to me, while I ate my bread and cheese, and presently advised me to take a cab and drive home ; but this I scorned to do, being perfectly fit again. I said I hoped to see him once more some day and he only took sixpence for all my refreshment. He was a good man and I felt jolly obliged to him—especially when he told me that my faint was not a disgrace in itself, but more in the nature of a misfortune.

I walked home and said nothing about this unfortunate event ; but merely told Aunt Augusta that I had not been able to get into the Lyceum, which was the strict truth and no

more. For if I had revealed to her about fainting she would have fussed me to death and very likely made me go to Harley Street in grim earnest and not merely as a spectator of that famous spot.

Two nights later I went to the Lyceum again and waited three hours, and being laden in every pocket with sausage rolls, mince pies, and fat, sustaining pieces of chocolate, simply laughed at the waiting. However, it was a lesson in its way ; and the lesson was never to be hungry in London. It is the worst place in the world to be hungry in—owing to the great strain on the nerves, no doubt. And hunger weakens the strength in a very marked way and makes you liable to be run over, or anything. Besides that, to be hungry is not only very uncomfortable in itself ; but it makes you a great nuisance to other people ; and the hungry person ought not to go into crowds for fear of the consequences. A time was coming when I was going to see hundreds of hungry persons all assembled in one place together ; but that remarkable and fearful sight did not happen until many months later.

The immediate result of the fainting was a change of diet, and you will be glad to know

I shall never mention the bun and the glass of milk again ; because it went out of my career from that day forward.

I had no secrets from Mr. Blades, who was now my greatest and most trusted friend in London. Therefore I told him about the catastrophe, making him first swear silence ; and he explained it all and let me go out to lunch with him that very day, to show me what a good and nourishing lunch ought to be.

“ It is silly to say you can’t pay for it,” declared Mr. Blades, “ because you must. And it is far better to pay for a chop or steak or even a sausage and mashed and half of bitter ale, than to find yourself in the doctor’s hands.”

He was full of these wise and shrewd sayings ; so I went to an eating-house with him and never laughed so much before, owing to the screamingly funny way in which a waiter shouted things down a tube. It was not so much the things in themselves as the way he shortened the names of them, to save his precious time. Men came in and gave their orders, and then this ridiculous but exceedingly clever waiter shouted his version of the orders down a pipe which led to the

kitchen of the restaurant, where the dishes were being prepared.

It was like this : the waiter cruised round among the customers and collected orders for soup. Two men ordered ox-tail soup, three had mock-turtle soup, Mr. Blades decided for vegetable soup, and I had pea soup. Well, of course, that was far too much to shout down the tube, so the genius of a waiter said, "Two ox, three mocks, a veg, and a pea!" And there you were! In less than no time the various soups appeared, and the funniest thing of all to me was, that nobody saw anything funny about it. But I roared—I couldn't help it, and much to my regret annoyed Mr. Blades, who told me not to play the fool where he was known. After a time I steadied down and made an ample meal; and afterwards it transpired that it was generally the custom of Mr. Blades to play a couple of games of dominoes with some of his friends, who lunched at the same place. But, though he promised to teach me, it was impossible that day owing to my being quite unsteadied and helpless and imbecile with laughing just at the end of the lunch.

It was, I need hardly say, the amazing waiter. He saw that he had frightfully

amused me and perhaps thought he would get an extra tip for being so wonderful. Which he did do, for I gave him sixpence and made Mr. Blades angry again.

But the waiter deserved a pound, for when two men ordered gorgonzola cheese and another man ordered a currant dumpling and three others wanted kidneys on toast, he excelled himself by screaming down to the kitchen these memorable words :

“ Two gorgons, a dump, and three kids ! ” Then he winked at me and I simply rolled about helplessly and wept with laughing. This must have been one of that glorious waiter’s greatest efforts, I think, because several other quite elderly men laughed too.

He was called ‘ William,’ and I knew him well in a week. He had a rich fund of humour, but was very honest and hard-working and a Londoner to the backbone. He hated foreign waiters and said that the glitter of his shiny hair was produced by a little fat from the grill well rubbed in every morning. No barber’s stuff could touch it, he said, and if it made him smell like a mutton chop, who thought the worse of him for that ? He expected twopence after each luncheon, and if any stranger gave him less, he made

screamingly funny remarks. In his evenings he waited at the banquets of the City Companies, which are the most stupendous feeds the world has ever known since Nero's times ; and at these dinners he often heard State and other secrets, which he said would have been worth a Jew's eye to him if he had not been an honest man. He didn't, of course, say these things as if they were meant to be true. Simple people no doubt would have believed them, but I soon got to notice that he accompanied many of his most remarkable statements with a wink, which disarmed criticism, as the saying is. He was a good man at heart and had a wife at home and also a lame daughter who would never walk ; so, though one would not have thought it, he had his trials. In fact nearly everybody I met, when I got to know them, told me about distressing things which they hid from the world. Even Mr. Blades, who seemed to preserve the even tenor of his way with great skill, confessed to me that he had a brother very different from himself and evidently very inferior in every way. In fact it looked to me, though of course I never hinted at such a thing, that the brother of Mr. Blades must have been rapidly sinking

into a shady customer of the deadliest sort.

Really for the moment, after I took to proper lunches, it seemed as if I was the only man in the office with no private worries.

VI

I FOUND that the clerks at the Apollo Fire Office were much more interesting than the work, and I told Mr. Blades so on an occasion when with his usual great generosity he had given me some useful help, because I was behind-hand and had forgotten what I ought to have remembered. But that I should find the clerks more interesting than the work did not please Mr. Blades, and he thought badly of the idea.

“If you are going to be an insurance clerk, the first thing is to master the insurance business,” he said, very truly and wisely to me; and then it was that I told him of my great ambition to become an actor in the future. He instantly disapproved of it.

“There was a clerk in this office in the past, and he went on the stage and did well,” he admitted; “but he was exceptional in every way. He was older than you and had a very remarkably handsome face.”

“In tragedy,” I said, “a handsome face doesn’t matter so much.”

“When you talk of tragedy,” answered Mr. Blades, “you mention the greatest heights of the profession. You are not built to play tragic parts, being far too thin and long in the legs, in my opinion. Besides, it is a calling in which only one in a thousand does any real good. I should advise you to stick to insurance and try to master the principles of it.”

Of course I was getting on, but the lower walks of the science of insurance are tame, and it would not be interesting to explain rates and risks and tariffs and the explosive point of mineral oils and other important things, all of which have to be taken into account by the beginner.

But the clerks were far more full of interest, and some were stern and ambitious men, who were determined sooner or later to get to the top of the office and become Secretary ; and some were easy men without great ambition, but full of ideas, though the ideas were not about the science of risk from fire. There was one remarkable man, whose age was thirty-two, and he lived at Clapham in lodgings all alone. This man,

whose name was Tomlinson, possessed enormous ability in the direction of racehorses. His knowledge of these famous quadrupeds was most extraordinary. If you looked into a paper and saw the name of a racehorse, Tomlinson would instantly tell you whether it was a male or female horse, and the name of its father and mother, or I should say sire and dam. He would also tell you its age and its owner and its trainer and the jockeys who had ridden it, and the races it had run and was going to run, and the money, if any, it had earned in stakes during its career.

In this singular man's desk were evidences of his passion for the turf. Nailed to the lid was the shoe or 'racing plate' of a Derby winner, and arranged round it were photographic portraits of racehorses extracted from packets of cigarettes. A particular brand of cigarettes always contained these portraits, and so, naturally, Tomlinson smoked them. He seldom went to race-meetings himself, but read all the particulars of each race with great perseverance, in order to guide his future betting transactions. He had a Turf Agent and visited him frequently during the luncheon hour, and on the occa-

sion of the classic races, such as the Derby and Oaks, or St. Leger, Tomlinson always arranged a sweepstake in the Country Department of the Apollo Fire Office and was well thought of for doing so.

He said that if he had been blessed with a good income he should have become a 'gentleman backer,' which is some particular order of turf-specialist; and if he had been born with real wealth, he should have been an owner of racehorses, and a member of the Jockey Club. As it was, he knew several jockeys—though, curiously enough, jockeys are not themselves members of this far-famed club.

Then I might mention Wardle, who was the chief of one of the divisions of the Country Department, and a man of such varied mind that, while very skilful in his profession of insurance, he yet found leisure to develop the art of music to the very highest pitch. He was, in fact, a professional organist on Sundays; and not contented with this, actually composed music in the loftiest Gregorian manner, and played it on his organ before the congregation. His way of work was a great revelation to me, for while Tomlinson might

be calculating the proper weights for a handicap, or taking down names for a sweepstake, Wardle, with a piece of music paper before him, which it always was in his spare moments, would be arranging triumphs of thorough bass and counterpoint and so on—all to delight his congregation some day, when the composition was finished. He did not like Wagner, and told me that he was a charlatan and would soon vanish for ever; but Mozart he considered his own master, and said that Mozart was the very spirit and essence and soul of religious music. He spoke bitterly, but quite patiently, about the vicar of the church where he played and said that the man, though a well-meaning and honourable man, had never grasped the powers of music in religion.

“If he had,” said Wardle, “I should have had a new organ to play upon long ago. Our instrument is very inferior and our choir a thing of nought. As it is, the people come to hear me and not him.”

But one of his pieces of music had been played by a friend on the organ of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and Wardle had heard it and been a good deal moved to find how his composition came out amid the solemn and

glorious architecture of that sacred edifice. He hoped it would be played at Westminster Abbey, when the regular organist was taking his holiday and his locum tenens, as they call it, was in his place. Because this locum tenens was known to Mr. Wardle and believed in his powers of composition.

This genuine musician, on finding that every sort of art interested me a good deal, became very friendly and was so good as to ask me to go to his church one Sunday and hear him play, and have dinner with him afterwards. It was a great compliment, and of course I went and was deeply impressed to see the amazing ease with which Wardle, in surplice and cassock, handled his organ and managed the pedals and pulled out stops, and turned over the music and played psalms and hymns and responses and so on,—all with unfailing success. During the collection the hymn came to an end too soon, and doubtless, with a less complete master of harmony than Wardle, an awkward pause would have ensued ; but, with a nerve begot of long practice, he permitted his fingers to stray over the ‘Ivories,’ as they call them, and his feet to stray over the pedals, with a result both rich and harmonious. A solemn

melody reverberated through the aisles and rolled from the instrument, and entirely concealed the mean sound of pennies and threepenny pieces falling into the collecting dishes.

I praised this feat warmly after the service, and Wardle was gratified that I had noticed it. Then I asked him why he did not commit such an improvisation to paper, so that it should not be lost, and he laughed and said :

“ Why, it was a music-hall tune : ‘ *Father’s teeth are stopped with zinc !* ’ ”

He explained, to my great astonishment, that if you alter the time and the general hang of a tune, and play it with all the solemn notes and deep stops and flourishes of an organ, the most skilful ear is deceived. It was only another tribute to the man’s amazing cleverness ; but somehow I felt disappointed that he should have done this thing. It seemed unworthy of him. He had a piano of his own, secured on the hire system ; and upon this instrument, after dinner, he played me a great deal of his own music, including many of the numbers from a beautiful fairy opera that he had written with a friend—the words being by the friend.

“ The libretto is footle,” confessed Wardle ;

“but if I could only get a libretto worth talking about, I should surprise some of us.”

I told him that he had already surprised me; but, of course, he meant the outer world of opera-goers and enthusiasts of music, who abound in London, and are to be seen thronging the great concert halls by night.

Another man of exceptional genius was Bassett—a volunteer and a crack shot. He belonged to the Artists’ Corps and was, you might say, every inch a soldier, in the complete disguise of an insurance clerk.

This martial man seemed always to be panting for bloodshed, and openly hoped that England would go to war with some important nation—in fact, one of the Great Powers for choice—before he was too old to participate in the struggle. He knew as much of our military heroes as Tomlinson knew of our racehorses. He was not content with being a sergeant in the Artists’ Corps and one of their leading marksmen, but also went into the deepest science of battle and tactics and strategy. He read war by day and he dreamed of war by night, and he would have liked to see conscription come in at any moment.

This fiery, but large-hearted man was very

anxious for me to become a volunteer, and it was a great sorrow to me to find that he did not feel any further interest in me when I refused to do so, while thanking him heartily for the idea. He said that drilling was far better and more useful than going down to the L.A.C. to caper about half-naked, and that if I did regular drills and so on, I should in time come to the Field Days, and have all the joy of forced marches and manœuvres at Easter, and sleeping under canvas, and going on sentry duty by night and waking to the ringing sound of the trumpet at dawn.

But none of these things tempted me as much as Bassett expected. In fact, I had already discovered in earlier life that the god Mars was nothing to me. Bassett said that he didn't know what the young generation was coming to when I told him this, and he hinted, rather openly, that I was unpatriotic. But I would not allow that I was. I said :

“ We can't all be volunteers, any more than we can all be proper soldiers.”

And Dicky Travers, who, though also quite dead to the martial spirit, was a most patriotic man in sporting matters, called Bassett a ‘ dog-shooter ’ !

This, however, was merely repartee, of

which Mr. Travers was a complete master. In fact, he had invented a nickname for everybody in the Department, and at his wish, having a slight turn for rhyming, I made up a long poem of thirty-eight verses, being one verse for each man in the Department. The mere poetry, which was nothing, was mine ; but the rich humour and subtle irony, not to say satire, was the work of Dicky Travers. Each verse of this poem was arranged in the shape of a ' Limerick,' which is a simple sort of rhyme well suited to humour combined with satire ; and it showed the delicate skill of Mr. Travers and his surprising knowledge of human nature, that each person who read the poem invariably laughed very heartily at thirty-seven verses—in fact all except the verse about himself. I noticed this peculiar fact and was rather astonished at it ; but Travers was not astonished. He said :

“ My dear Corkey, when you are as old as I am, you will find that to see your friends scored off is one of those trials in life which you can always manage to get over. But the feeling is entirely different when anybody scores off you.”

I may give a glimpse of yet another first-

class and original man before concluding this short chapter and proceeding to more serious business.

In some ways Mr. Bent, who lived at Chislehurst, was among the most naturally gifted of the staff of the Country Department of the Apollo. His talent, or you might almost say 'genius,' was purely horticultural; and by dint of long and patient study, and devoting his entire spare income and all his spare time to the subject, he had gradually arranged and planted a garden that would undoubtedly have become historical, if only it had been a little bit larger.

It was his custom to give the Department a taste of his great skill during the summer months, for flowers were to him what a sporting paper was to Tomlinson, or a rifle to Bassett—in fact, the breath of his nostrils.

On his desk he had two vases, and in these vases always stood choice blossoms during official hours. Sometimes I recognised them, and oftener I did not; but when I did not, Mr. Bent, who was a man of mild expression and thin and stooping appearance, told me the names, such as *Alströmeria* and *Carpentaria* and *Berberidopsis* and *Oncocyclus* *Iris* and *Pardanthus* and *Calochortus* and

Magnolia and Mummy Pea and many another horticultural triumph of the rarest sort. After the day was done, with the generosity of the born gardener, he would give away these precious things to anybody who wanted a buttonhole ; but there were times when he naturally expected some return for magnificent hothouse exotics, which he brought to the office in the depths of winter or early spring, when flowers were worth money. Such things as gardenias and Marechal Niel roses and Eucharis lilies he invariably raffled —not, as he told me, for gain, but simply to pay, or help pay, for the expense of buying coke for his hothouse, the temperature of which had to be kept up to fever heat, as you might say, in order that the various tropical marvels grown by Mr. Bent should survive the English winter.

Finding that I was very anxious to understand gardening, because I knew that many famous actors had said in newspapers that they occupied their leisure in their palatial gardens and orchid houses, Mr. Bent most kindly allowed me to go down one afternoon after office hours, not only to see his garden, but, better still, to watch him gardening in it.

“It is a pursuit that needs certain gifts,” he told me, as we rode in the train to Chislehurst. “You must, of course, first have the enthusiasm and love of the science for itself ; but that is not enough. You must make sacrifices and read learned books and study the life-history of plants and their various requirements. Some, for instance, like lime and some die if you give them lime. A lily, or a rhodo. or an azalea hates lime ; a rose likes it. Some alpine plants must have limestone chips to be prosperous ; others, again, like granite chips. My son, a child of tender age but already full of the gardening instinct, once gave a choice saxifrage a pennyworth of cocoanut chips—under the infantile hope that what pleased him so well would please the plant. A touching story which does not in my opinion spoil by repetition.”

In this improving way Mr. Bent talked, and when we reached his home he disappeared instantly to don his gardening clothes, while his wife gave me some tea. She, too, was a gardener and very kindly advised me to be especially delighted with a plant called *Myosotidium*, which Mr. Bent had flowered for the first time in his life. It was rather like a huge forget-me-not with rhubarb leaves, and

it came from New Zealand and cost five shillings.

Then Mrs. Bent's little boy arrived and she told me how he had given cocoanut chips to the saxifrage; and he didn't like me, unfortunately, and wouldn't go into the garden with me. And then Mr. Bent returned accoutred in all the trappings of the professional gardener. He wore a blue apron and leather gloves and a clump of bast sticking out of his pocket; and his trousers and sleeves turned up and everything complete.

"I must be busy," he said, "but my collection is completely labelled, and you will have no difficulty in following the general scheme of the garden."

This was true, because of the great simplicity of the scheme. The garden, in fact, ran down quite straight between two other gardens, and finished at a brick wall.

"A howling wilderness you see on each side," explained Mr. Bent, waving his trowel to the right and left. By this he meant, of course, that the other gardens only had roses and wallflowers and carnations and larkspurs and lilac, and the common or garden flowers familiar to the common or garden gardener.

But it was no 'side' on Mr. Bent's part to talk in this scornful way, because to him, from his eagle heights of horticulture, so to speak, his neighbours' gardens were barren wastes, with nothing in them to detain the expert for a moment.

His garden was literally stuffed with rare and curious things. He admitted that some of them were not beautiful; but they were rare and in some cases he doubted if anybody else in Kent had them. It never occurred to him that nobody else in Kent might want them. Everything was beautifully labelled with metal labels, and many of the rarer and more precious alpine plants had zinc guards put round them to keep away garden pests, such as slugs and snails.

I couldn't believe that a snail would have dared to show his face in that garden; but Mr. Bent said he always had to be fighting them, and that sometimes they conquered and managed to scale a zinc guard and devour a small choice alpine in a single night!

He had most beautiful flowers to show me; or rather he let me walk up and down among them while he gardened. It was very interesting to see the sure professional touch of Mr. Bent. He never hesitated or doubted

what to do. He knew exactly what to cut off a plant, or how much water to give it, or how to tie up a trailer. He planted out a few seedling zinnias to show me. Then he watered them in and removed the seed boxes, and all was neat and tidy in a moment.

He handled long and difficult Latin names with the consummate ease of a native, and he showed me piles of gardeners' catalogues. Once he had raised a begonia from seed, which they accepted at Kew Gardens, and the Director of Kew gave him something in exchange for his hothouse.

"It died," said Mr. Bent, "and that through no fault of mine; but the distinction and the compliment have not died and never will."

He was a member of the R.H.S., or Royal Horticultural Society, and he had shown a plant now and again at their meetings, but without any honour falling to it.

Before supper I was allowed to help Mr. Bent with a garden hose on the grass; and while we were at work a man from next-door looked over the wall and wished Mr. Bent 'good evening' and asked for some advice. Seeing me, he told me the story of Mr. Bent's little boy and the cocoanut chips for the third time; then he explained to Mr. Bent that

his sweet peas were curling up rather oddly and said that he would thank him to go and have a look at them.

“ Good Lord, the peas a failure ! ” said Mr. Bent ; then with his usual kindness he instantly hastened to see if anything could be done. When he returned I could see that he was troubled.

“ His peas have failed,” he said. “ It is one of those disasters that come upon even good gardeners sometimes. Not that Mason is a good gardener, or, in fact, a gardener at all in the real sense. I don’t know what has happened to his peas—the trouble is below ground and might be one of five different things ; but all is over with the peas. I have told him to give up hope about them. I may be able to spare him some annuals later.”

Mrs. Bent, who was a most perfect woman for a gardener’s wife, insisted on picking me a bunch of good and sweet flowers before I went away, and then, just as I was going, Mr. Bent’s brother-in-law walked past the gate and stopped to ask a horticultural question. He was a beginner, but such was Mr. Bent’s fire and genius in these matters that he inspired everybody with his own passion

for the science and, as he truly said, no one could know him intimately without sooner or later becoming a gardener.

I am sure I was full of enthusiastic joy about it after supper, and if my Aunt Augusta had had enough garden to grow a blade of grass, I should have planted one. Even as it was, I planned a box for bulbs and things during the next autumn.

Mr. Bent's brother-in-law happened to be going to the tobacconist's, and he walked as far as the station with me after he had bought half a pound of coarse tobacco to fumigate his greenhouse which was bursting with green-fly and other pests. Thus I heard the story of Mr. Bent's little boy and the cocoanut chips for the fourth time, and it was rather instructive in its way to find how the fun of it had waned. In fact, such was my feeling to the story, that I didn't even tell it to Aunt Augusta when I got home; though, coming fresh to her, it might have faintly amused her.

As an example of the poem that I had written with Dicky Travers, I may here quote the verse upon Mr. Bent. It ran as follows :

“A middle-aged wonder called Bent,
Made the deuce of a garden in Kent,
And his roses and lilies
And daffadown dillies
All helped with the gentleman's rent.”

Here, you see, was humour combined with satire. But the peculiarity of the poem held in the case of this verse, as it did in all the others. While everybody else thought it good, Mr. Bent considered it vulgar and didn't like it in the least, because of the ironic allusion to raffles.

He never asked me to see his garden again, though I entered for raffle after raffle of his choice exotics and once won four fine gardenias, at the ridiculous cost of a penny, and took them home to Aunt Augusta.

VII

IN course of time Mr. Travers informed me that I was elected an active member of the L.A.C. These magic letters stand for the London Athletic Club, easily the most famous athletic club in the world. I had been there as one of the public on several occasions, and already knew by sight such giants of the arena as Phillips and George and Cowie and other most notable men, all historically famous. In fact George soon joined the professional ranks, as we say, and the day was coming when he would run a mile faster than anybody in the world had ever run it.

The first time I went to Stamford Bridge it so happened that a most sad misfortune fell on my friend Dicky Travers.

He had entered for a two-mile walking race and trained very carefully for it—as well he might, because, such was his universal fame at this distance, that he was handicapped to give all the other com-

petitors a lot of start. Some had actually as much as a minute start; but Dicky started from scratch. He told me in the morning of the day that he felt very well and expected to get pretty near fourteen minutes for the two miles. I lunched with him on the day, and, as it was an evening meeting at the L.A.C. and he would not be racing before six o'clock, he ate a steak and some bread and cheese; but he drank nothing but water; because experience had shown him that beer was no use before a great struggle of this sort.

In due time, after the first heats of a 'sprint' and a half-mile race, the walking competition came on, and I was very glad to hear several spectators cheer Travers when he appeared on the cinder path. I also did the same. He wore black drawers and vest; but the rest of him was, of course, entirely bare, save for his feet, which were encased in walking shoes which he had made expressly to his directions. In each hand he carried an oblong cork, and his face had a cheerful and calm expression which little indicated the great ordeal before him.

Eight men had entered for the race, and

the limit man went off at such a great pace that it seemed absurd to suppose Travers could ever get near him. Others started quickly after each other according to the handicap, and then a man called Forrester started. He was next to Travers and received only ten seconds start from him. But such was his speed that he had gone about forty yards before Dicky was told to go.

Every eye was fixed upon the scratch man as, with a magnificent and raking action, he set out on his gigantic task. Though not very tall, he had a remarkable stride, and his legs, which were slightly hairy and magnificently shaped, were remarkable, owing to a muscle that had developed on the front of the shin bones. This is the walking muscle, and only great walkers and racers have it developed in this extraordinary manner. Travers had a very long stride and a graceful motion. You didn't realise that he was going so fearfully fast till you saw that, from the first, he began to gain upon the rest. Some of the others—all, of course, men of great distinction—appeared to be walking quite as fast as Dicky; but they were not. Umpires ran along on the grass inside the track to see the walking was

fair ; and the men who performed this onerous task had all been famous also in their day.

At last they exercised their umpiring powers and stopped one of the competitors. He had a most curious action, certainly, and several experts near me prophesied from the first that he would be pulled out. He didn't seem to be actually running and he didn't seem to be actually walking. It was a kind of shuffle of a very swift and speedy character ; but whatever it exactly was, the umpires didn't like it and told him that he was disqualified. He was a very tall man in a red costume, and he didn't seem in the least surprised when they stopped him. In fact he was rather glad, I believe. A spectator next to me, smoking a cigar and talking very loud, said that the man had been really making the pace for another man.

Now the race had covered a mile and Travers was walking in the most magnificent manner it is possible to describe. An expression of great fierceness was in his eye and he was foaming slightly at the mouth, like a spirited steed. He and the man who had received ten seconds from him were too good for the rest of the field, and when

they had covered a mile and a half, they passed the leader up to that distance and simply left him standing still. It was now clear there was going to be a historic race for the victory between Forrester and Travers, and the supporters of each great athlete shouted encouragement and yelled and left no stone unturned to excite their man to make a supreme effort and win. Travers and Forrester were walking one behind the other and it was, of course, a classical exhibition of fair 'heel-and-toe' work, such as is probably never seen outside the famous precincts of the L.A.C. I shrieked for Travers and the man next me, with the cigar, howled for Forrester. Such was his excitement that the man with the cigar seized his hat and waved it to Forrester as he passed; and seeing him do this, I seized my hat, too, and waved it to Dicky.

Of course Travers, with the enormous cunning of the old stager, had kept just behind Forrester all the way—to let him set the pace; but now he knew that Forrester was slacking off a little—to save himself for a great finish—and so Travers felt that the time had come to make his bid for victory. It was just passing me

that he did so, and I saw the flash of genius in his eye as he gathered himself for the supreme effort that was to dash the hopes of Forrester. Only one more round of the cinder track had to be made, so Dicky instantly got to Forrester's shoulder and, after a few terrific moments, during which I and the man with the cigar and many others practically ceased to breathe, Travers wrested the lead from Forrester. It was a gigantic achievement and a cool and knowing sportsman near me with a stop watch in his hand declared that if Dicky wasn't pulled up he would do fourteen and a quarter. "He's getting among it," said the cool hand, which was his way of meaning that Travers was promised to achieve a notable performance.

But Forrester was not yet done with. This magnificent walker, in no way discouraged by his doughty foeman, stuck gamely to his colossal task and Travers, try as he would, could not shake him off.

"He's lifting! He's lifting!" screamed the man with the cigar. "Pull him out—stop him!"

"He's not—you're a liar!" I shouted back, in a fever of rage, because the friend

of Forrester, of course, meant that Travers was lifting. And if you 'lift' in a walking race, you are running and not walking and all is over.

They had only two hundred yards to go and Travers was still in front, when an umpire, to my horror, approached Dicky. He had been watching Dicky's legs with a microscopic scrutiny for some time and now he stopped the leader and told him that he was disqualified.

I shouted 'Shame! Shame!' with all my might, and so did several other men; but the man with the cigar, who evidently understood only too well the subtleties of lifting among sprint walkers, screamed shrilly with exaggerated joy and behaved like a silly fool in every possible way.

Forrester, relieved of his formidable rival, took jolly good care not to lift himself. And as the next man in the race was nearly a hundred yards behind, he, of course, won comfortably.

Travers behaved like the magnificent sportsman he was, and I felt just as proud of knowing him as if he'd actually won; for he did not whine and swear and bully the umpires or anything like that. He just took

his coat from the bench where he had thrown it before the race, inquired of the timekeeper what Forrester had done it in, and presently walked into the dressing-room with the others, quite indifferent to the hearty cheers that greeted him and the victor.

I went in while he dressed and he said the verdict, though hard, was just.

“ I knew he was going to do me when he came up again after I passed him,” explained Travers. “ He’s a North London chap in a lawyer’s office. I’ve never walked against him before. I ought to have pushed him much earlier and tried to outwalk him for the mile. He’s got fine pace. Look at the time—14.22—and he wasn’t walking after I came off. I meet him again at Catford Bridge next month. He seems a very good sort.”

Thus did this remarkable sportsman take his defeat. But he was, of course, cast down by it, for he had only been stopped twice before during the whole of his honourable and brilliant career on the cinder path.

As for my own experience, I went down after my election and Travers himself came to see how I shaped. At Merivale I had been a sprinter and had done well up to two hun-

dred yards, and since I came to London I had seen Harry Hutchings—the greatest sprinter who ever lived and of course a professional champion. Therefore I decided to go in for that branch of the pedestrian's art. I bought my costume which was entirely black, like Dicky's, and a pair of spiked running shoes and a black bag to carry them in. Then I went down one evening after office hours with my friend, and he introduced me to Nat Perry and his son, Charles Perry. Nat Perry was the hero of many a hard-won field, and immense and dogged courage sat upon his bronzed and clean-shaved countenance. Many hundreds of athletes had passed through his hands to victory or defeat, as the case might be, and he was a master in the art of judging an athlete's powers. As the friend of Travers he welcomed me with great kindness, heard that I wanted to be a sprinter, but seemed doubtful whether I was the sort of build for that branch of running.

“ You look more like a half-miler or miler with them legs,” he said, casting his eye over me critically but kindly. “ And you're on the thin side. You want to put on some flesh. But you're young yet.”

I told Nat Perry that I hoped to put on some

flesh and that I was prepared to follow his advice in everything. We came out on to the track presently, and I ran and Perry watched. But he kept very calm about it and I had a sort of feeling he wasn't much interested. Presently he said :

“ You don't begin running till you've gone fifty yards. Start running from the jump off.”

He asked another man, who was training, to show me how to start ; because his own athletic days were, of course, at an end, and he could not show me in person. But the other man most kindly came over and showed me how to get set and how to start like an arrow from a bow, which is half the art of sprinting.

After the trial was over Nat Perry said that it was impossible to prophesy anything until I had shaken down and found my feet on the cinders. “ You may be a runner or you may not,” he told me. “ I've seen bigger duffers than you shape into runners. You work hard for a month and get up your appetite and eat all you can pack away. Running or no running, the exercise in the open air's what you want, and plenty of it.”

He rubbed me down after I had had a

shower bath and gave me a locker for my things. He was a good man besides being so famous, and everybody thought a great deal of him at the L.A.C. His son was also an exceedingly clever trainer.

In course of time I was introduced to a few of the stars of the club, with whom, of course, Travers mixed on terms of perfect equality. They were all brilliant men, and their knowledge of athletics and times and great feats of the past filled me with interest and respect.

I enjoyed the evenings at the L.A.C. very much indeed, and I gradually improved till Perry decided that I had better enter for one of the evening handicaps.

“It will accustom you to the feel of it,” he said. “You’ll have to get over the strangeness before you do anything; and there’s your handicap to be thought on. As an unknown you won’t have your fair start at first; but after you’ve lost your heat for a month of Sundays, then you’ll be on your proper mark and may get on. You’re not a flyer and very like never will be—you ain’t got the physic; but you’ll do a bit, I dare say. And there’s hope for a mile, if you come on next year. No good for a quarter

nor yet a half—too punishing. Your 'cart wouldn't stand it."

Thus this able and honest man encouraged me cautiously and I obeyed him, and in due time appeared to contest my heat in a hundred yards' handicap.

It was exciting, but it didn't last long. I took a preliminary spin and then, curiously enough, a thing happened that quite put me off for the moment. You must know the L.A.C. ground ran along one side of a railway cutting and on the other side, running, in fact, parallel with the athletic grounds, was a cemetery. And now, just as I was going to have a second preliminary spin, there came across the railway cutting the exceedingly mournful sound of a funeral bell tolling. Somehow I felt that while on one side of the line was a crowd of excited and eager men full of life and hope and joy, and others, like myself, also full of life and hope and joy, going to run in a competition and exert their wonderful energies to the utmost—while this was happening upon one side of the railway cutting, a scene of a very different nature was going on upon the other. And I got a sort of fancy they were burying a young man in his eighteenth year, like myself—a man who

only a few days before was full of fight, and enjoying life and hoping no doubt some day to be somebody worth talking about. And now, instead of taking the world by storm and getting knighted even, or other honours, here was the unfortunate chap being tolled into the earth under the weeping eyes of a heart-broken mother and other relations. The reality of the thing was fearful, and it was rather sad in a way, too, because it did me no good to have my mind distracted in this manner just before I was called upon to battle against four other men, all considerably older than I was myself.

In fact they had to rouse me and call me to the starting-post, where the other competitors had already assembled. There was no man at scratch in my heat, but a great and powerful athlete called Muspratt, who received four yards from scratch, was the best runner of the five. I got eight yards, which was only four from Muspratt and not enough ; and of the other three men in the race, one, who was startlingly fat to be a sprinter, had nine yards and one had ten.

At the sound of the pistol we all dashed off and I started fairly well. The sensation in a sprint of this kind is most interesting,

because at first your position with respect to the other runners is unchanged. Though you are all flying along at a terrific pace, you appear to be all hardly moving at all. But then, after about half the distance had been run, I found, much to my astonishment, that I had caught the man who had one yard start from me, and both he and I were almost dead level with the front man. Now, of course, was the time for me to make my supreme effort ; but just as I was about to do so, I became conscious of something white on my left and found, to my great interest, that Muspratt was only a yard behind me. In fact he was already making his effort, and when I made mine it proved useless against Muspratt, who was an old warhorse of the cinder path and a magnificent judge of pace. Twenty yards from the tape I honestly believe the whole five of us were in a dead line ; but Muspratt really had us in the hollow of his hand, though we little knew it and all strained every nerve for victory. He slid past us, however, and broke the tape a yard ahead of myself and the fat man. And I was honestly more amazed by the splendid running of the fat man than anything else in the heat ; because it showed what pluck

and training and the genius of Nat Perry could do, even for such an unpromising sprinter.

Travers, who most kindly consented to come down that evening and encourage me, though he was not doing anything himself, figured it all out very correctly on paper afterwards. The heat was run in ten and three-fifths of a second by Muspratt with four yards start, and he beat me by a yard and a half. Therefore Travers considered that I had done what would have amounted to a shade worse than eleven seconds from scratch.

Muspratt, who ran in an eyeglass, by the way, which was interesting in itself, though spectacles were common enough with sprinters, got second in the final heat, which was won by a man with nine yards start, who had never before won as much as a salt-cellar, though he had been competing for two years unavailingly.

But though of great interest to me, I cannot say any more about my doings at the London Athletic Club, because other more important matters have to be told. What with running and cricket matches against other Fire and Life Insurance Offices, I now got plenty of exercise and felt exceedingly

well and keen to proceed with the most important business of my life—which was, of course, to become a tragic actor and play in the greatest dramatic achievements of the human mind.

VIII

AT last there came the solemn evening when I arrived at the Dramatic School.

It was in a quiet sort of corner off the top of Regent Street, and I got there at six o'clock for my first lesson in the Thespian art. No less than four other youngish men had already assembled, and with them was an old or, at any rate, distinctly oldish man of rather corpulent appearance, with a clean-shaved face and grey hair. I thought at first he was the famous actor and elocutionist, Mr. Montgomery Merridew, of universal fame, who was to be my instructor in elocution and stage deportment ; but judge of my surprise when I discovered that the distinctly oldish man was a pupil like myself ! He gazed with rather an envious look at the other pupils, and no doubt wished that he had turned to the art earlier in life ; and I felt he was a fatherly and a kindly sort of man,

and certainly added weight and dignity to the class.

He was called Henry Smith, but proposed to change this name for something more attractive when he got his first engagement ; and the other men were named respectively Leonard Brightwin, Wilford Gooding, Harold Crowe, and George Arthur Dexter.

Naturally, I scanned their faces eagerly to see if any were destined to the highest tragical walks of the drama ; and I found that two were evidently going to be low comedians. These were Harold Crowe and Wilford Gooding. Crowe was a fair man with rather prominent eyes, and he concealed his nervousness under a cloak of humour of a trivial character ; and Gooding was thin, with a very small head and a comic face, which he could move about in a most grotesque manner. He and Crowe already knew each other. George Arthur Dexter had a keen and knowing face, and was exceedingly stylishly dressed in a check suit, with an ivory skeleton's head in his tie, a carnation in his buttonhole, and several rings, which appeared to have genuine precious stones in them, on his hands. He had an assertive presence and seemed in-

clined to take the lead among us. He might easily have been mistaken for an actor already, and indeed told us that he was an old hand on the amateur boards.

He explained to us that he had only come for polish, and wasn't really sure if Mr. Merridew would be able to teach him anything that he didn't know already.

This man, curiously enough, was the first man I didn't like in London. Of course I didn't like the shady customer who pretended to be Mr. Martin Tupper, but I only hated him afterwards; whereas, in the case of Dexter, I felt a feeling of dislike from the start. He was so fearfully contented with himself, and his clothes, and his skeleton's head and his great histrionic gifts.

But Leonard Brightwin was a very different sort of man. Genius blazed out of his black eyes; he wore his raven locks long, and from time to time tossed them back from his forehead in a very artistic manner. In fact, I felt in the presence of a future leader of the stage. He was of medium height and of shy and retiring nature; but one could not help feeling that Brightwin was born to be a great tragedian. I longed to be his friend from the first.

We all fell into conversation of a very animated sort, and Dexter, who greatly fancied his powers of imitating well-known actors, was just doing Mr. Edward Terry in *The Forty Thieves* (as *he* thought, though it was utterly unlike), when the door opened and no less a person than the renowned Mr. Montgomery Merridew stood before us.

One saw the graceful abandon of the old stager at a glance. The way he walked, the way he extended his hand and poised his leonine head on his sinewy neck—all showed the practised histrion. He was a shapely man of fifty, at the least ; but such was the almost panther-like grace of his movements and rich auburn colour of his flowing moustache, that, but for the deep lines of thought on his brow and under his eyes, one might have imagined him many years younger.

An air of perfect assurance and the manner of one accustomed to rule, greatly distinguished Mr. Merridew. His voice was a magnificent organ, under perfect control, and every gesture and step were timed and studied to perfection. He was, in fact, an embodiment of the art that conceals art.

He bowed on entering, not in a servile manner, but with a courtly familiarity, such as doubtless one sees when kings meet kings. He appeared astonished at the smallness of the class collected to receive him; but he concealed his dismay under a nonchalant air of perfect good-breeding, which I am sure was a lesson in itself.

He greeted us each in turn and insisted on shaking hands with all of us. He wore pince-nez, while engaged in this manner, and having declared his pleasure at making our acquaintance, threw off the pince-nez with an almost regal gesture and lost no time, but bade us marshal ourselves before him, and then began an easy but most illuminating address on the art of stage deportment and elocution.

While engaged in this opening lecture, he scanned our faces in turn with such an eagle glance that only George Dexter had sufficient cheek to return his look. As for the two low comedians, they simply curled up under it, and so did I; and Brightwin, whose eyes were even more luminous than Mr. Merridew's, let them fall to the floor before the professional's impassioned gaze. As for poor Mr. Smith, he was, as it were,

mesmerised by the lecturer and kept his eye fixed upon the great actor's face, though evidently not wishing to do so.

Mr. Merridew said some beautiful things about art and was, in reality, a man of no little modesty, considering his fame. He certainly told us a great deal about himself ; but it was only to encourage us and show us what we might do. His career had been very picturesque, and he claimed for himself such rare and brilliant powers that he said he could act anything and everything—from a billiard ball to Macbeth. I mention this startling saying to show that he allowed stray flashes of humour—you might almost say *badinage*—to enlighten his discourse.

“An actor,” he said, “ought to be as sensitive as a photographic plate. He ought to be able instantly to catch the character that he proposes to portray and allow it entirely to absorb him and soak into every corner of his soul. When, for instance, I played Iago some few years ago, I ceased to be Montgomery Merridew during the whole progress of the run ! I *was* Iago—not only when on the boards, for so thoroughly had I permitted that fiend in human shape to permeate my being, that again and again I

caught myself thinking and feeling as Iago thought and felt outside the precincts of the theatre. That is an extreme case; and I instance it to show you a little of the extraordinary sensibility of the born actor. And not only can I play on the instrument ‘man’ and move to tears or laughter, with the ease of an accomplished musician playing on a musical instrument, but such is my intense feeling and emotional delicacy that I am equally moved myself when I watch another actor playing! The vibrating chords of my soul respond to him instantly; and though I may know that I could probably play the part far better myself, yet such is my sympathy and understanding, that I weep as readily as any untutored shop-boy in the audience—provided only that my colleague on the stage strives honestly to hold the mirror up to nature.”

He proceeded in this exalted strain for some time, then looked at his watch and concluded his preliminary remarks:

“Aristotle, gentlemen, has written a famous work entitled *The Poetics*, and no actor, or would-be actor, can afford to go without it. I shall ask you all to buy a copy—Bohn’s cheap edition—and ponder very

carefully what you find there. Tragedy is a combination of terror and pity. Through the one you are lifted to the other, and the actor who embarks on a classic part must always remember that he is not there merely to harrow the feelings of his fellow-creatures. Far from it—far from it. By all means let him terrify them first by the presentment of fearful passions; let him freeze them to the bone and curdle their life's blood, if he can, by his representation of rage, remorse, fear, and so forth; but behind and beneath—permeating, as it were, the very substance of the soul, we must have the direct appeal to humanity, to our fellow man and woman. We must remind them that what we do and suffer might be done and suffered by each one of them, given the dreadful circumstances; and then, gentlemen—then what have we achieved? Why, we have summoned compassion into the theatre! We have awakened in each member of the audience the most ennobling emotion of the human heart! And at such times, when playing in the greatest parts, I have felt through the silent, spellbound theatre an electric thrill for which no human creature was responsible; and I have

said, 'It is the wings of the angel of pity!''"

The noble man was much moved by this magnificent feat of eloquence. He blew his nose on a handkerchief which was obviously made of silk, and then, with a masterly touch, turned to us where we stood, deeply impressed by his spontaneous eloquence, and came, as it were, to earth with a bound.

"Now we must go through our paces, gentlemen," he said. "Upon the occasion of our next meeting, I will ask each of you to bring with him the play of *Hamlet*, and I shall cast it and rehearse a scene or two. Thus the business of elocution and deportment will go hand in hand, and, at the same time, you will be able to feel the artist's pride in uttering words and impersonating characters that have rejoiced many generations of men. But to-night I shall ask each in turn to recite before me some brief, familiar passage that is precious to him. I shall thus learn a little about your defects and can give each of you a few preliminary hints. Lastly, if time permit, I shall myself speak a speech before you with the elocution and gesture proper to

it, and explain my reasons as I proceed. I will ask Mr. Smith, as our senior student, to begin. Mount the rostrum, Mr. Smith, and forget our presence. Let the aura of your poet enfold you as with a garment, Mr. Smith. Seek to be one with him, whoever he is, and in tune with his conception—of course, to the best of your powers.”

I was greatly encouraged to find that Mr. Smith could rise to this challenge, for I'm sure I didn't feel as if I could; but Mr. Smith, without any evasion, bowed to Mr. Merridew and climbed three steps on to a low stage at the end of the classroom, and then said that he intended to recite the poet Shelley's "To a Skylark."

"Not all, Mr. Smith. There will hardly be time for all," said the preceptor. And this, I believe, secretly upset Mr. Smith and made him hurried and uneasy. For he was a retiring man of most delicate feelings, and the thought that he might be taking up too much time evidently put him bang out of his stride, as we say at the L.A.C.

Mr. Merridew settled himself in his chair, with the nonchalant attitude of the King in *Hamlet* during the beginning of the play

scene, and Mr. Smith, thrusting out his right arm in a rather unmeaning way, set off. He spoke in a hollow and mumbling voice, not suited to a skylark, and instantly the dreadful truth was forced upon us that he left out the *h's* ! He began like this :

“’Ail to thee, blithe spirit,
Bird thou never wert,
That from ’eaven or near it
 Pourest thy full ’eart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.”

Mr. Merridew started as though a serpent had stung him, at the very first word, for, of course, to his highly strung senses it must have been simple agony ; and I think Mr. Smith knew there was something wrong, too ; but he went on about “ ’igher still and ’igher,” and gradually warmed to his work, so that when he came to “ Thou dost float and run,” he actually tried to do it and stood on his toes and fluttered his arms ! It might have answered fairly well for a turkey, to say it kindly, but it was utterly wrong for a skylark. One felt that Mr. Smith had thought it all out and taken immense trouble, and it was rather sad in a way when the professor stopped him and told him to come down. Mr. Smith instantly shrank up ; and the

fire of recitation went out of him and he sneaked down humbly.

“It’s the aspirate,” he said. “I can’t ’elp it. I’ve fought it for years; but it conquers me.”

Mr. Merridew, however, was most encouraging.

“Be of good cheer,” he answered. “You labour under a common affliction. Much may be done to cure it with patience and perseverance. I shall give you some exercises presently. And you must choose your recitations with closer regard to your voice and personality. The ethereal and the soaring don’t become you, Mr. Smith. Something in the rugged and masculine, and even grim manner we must find for you. ‘Eugene Aram,’ perhaps, or ‘Christmas Day in the Workhouse,’ or ‘The Brand of Cain.’ ”

So that finished off Mr. Smith for the time being, and one felt, in a curious sort of way, that Aristotle’s pity and terror were there right enough, though not, of course, as Mr. Merridew exactly meant.

“Now, Mr. Dexter, what can you do for us?” inquired our preceptor, and George Dexter, who had been sniggering rather basely at Mr. Smith, leapt lightly to the platform.

“ ‘ Billy’s Rose,’ by G. R. Sims ! ” he said, and instantly plunged into that very pathetic and world-famous recitation. He accompanied it with a great deal of gesture, both of legs and arms, and at the end, when the rose is given to the angel Billy, he suddenly snatched his carnation out from under his coat, where he had concealed it, and held the flower aloft with an expression of radiant and beatific excitement. He remained in this position for some moments, and I believe rather expected that Mr. Merridew was going to applaud ; but he didn’t. All the great man said was :

“ You don’t finish with a conjuring trick, my dear Mr. Dexter. The rose is a thing of the spirit. I have the honour to know the poet who wrote those beautiful verses and the rose is, as it were, allegorical—an essence of the soul. And your mannerisms are thoroughly bad and amateurish. You’ve walked at least a quarter of a mile since you began. You are too aggressive, too defiant, too noisy. You tear a passion to tatters, Mr. Dexter. You must learn to serve your apprenticeship in a humble and chastened spirit. You have been in a bad school and there is much to undo.”

Of course, though I still hated Dexter, I was really sorry for this, because I felt it would knock all the life out of him at the very start of his career. While he turned exceedingly pale and dropped his carnation on the floor and returned to us, as though he wished to shelter himself from the bitter criticism of the professor, he was not really crushed. In fact, he whispered to me the insulting word 'fathead' as he rejoined us; and I knew that he and Mr. Merridew would be deadly enemies from that night forward.

Then Harold Crowe and Wilford Gooding asked if they might perform together, and Mr. Merridew permitted it; but when he found that they proposed to imitate those world-renowned music-hall entertainers, known as the 'Two Macs,' he stopped them.

"No, gentlemen," he said, "far be it from me to quarrel with the 'Two Macs.' They are genuine humorists, and their songs and dances and thoroughly English fun have often entertained me; but we are not here to emulate the vagaries of eccentric original comedians. Our purpose is to learn to walk first before we run, and we can develop our personal genius afterwards—if we have any."

Unfortunately, Crowe and Gooding could

do nothing but imitate the 'Two Macs,' so they lost their chance for that evening ; and then Leonard Brightwin took his place on the stage and recited Antony's great speech from *Julius Cæsar*.

I had been very uneasy as my turn approached for various reasons, because, curiously enough, the only things I knew by heart were purely religious, and learned long ago in my schooldays. In a few minutes, however, my anxieties were drowned in the joy of listening to Leonard Brightwin, who spoke with great force and feeling and accompanied his words with most appropriate expressions of the face. I felt that here was one who would certainly make the rest of us look very small.

Mr. Merridew was pleased but guarded.

"Quite good," he said. "A thousand faults, Mr. Brightwin, a thousand faults ; but there's ore in the mine and we shall bring it to the surface presently."

I congratulated Brightwin at this high praise, and he was evidently much pleased. He started to explain his view of Mark Antony to Mr. Smith, when the professor, who had begun to tire and yawn several times, called upon me.

“ Mr. Corkey, please ; and be brief, Mr. Corkey, for the lesson has been quite long enough.”

“ I must tell you, sir,” I said firmly, “ that I only *perfectly* know ‘ My Duty to my Neighbour.’ ”

Dexter laughed, as I knew he would, but Mr. Merridew by no means laughed.

“ You could not know anything better, Mr. Corkey,” he answered, “ but words hallowed by—by—sacred memories and—and—in fact—no. It will do for the moment if you just give us the alphabet—speaking slowly and distinctly, putting character and feeling into the letters. In fact, make them interesting.”

I stared in my great ignorance before this amazing man. I felt that it was quite beyond my power to make the alphabet interesting, or put character and feeling into the letters ; and I told him so honestly. I said :

“ No doubt you could, sir ; because you can act anything, from a billiard ball to Macbeth ; but it’s no good my trying, because I haven’t the faintest idea how to set about it.”

“ I’ll show you,” answered Mr. Merridew.

“ A thing of this kind, you must understand, is merely academic—an exercise, like a Chopin study—but it will give you a glimpse into the expression and control of emotions and passions, and show you how the skilled actor can make bricks without straw and something out of nothing.”

He rose from his professorial chair and lightly ascended the steps to the stage. Then he stood for a moment, rapt in brooding thought of the profoundest character, and then suddenly began :

‘ A ! ’ (astonishment combined with joy, as though he had suddenly met an old friend, long given up for lost). ‘ B ? ’ (a note of inquiry uttered with tremulous emotion, as though much depended upon it). ‘ C ’ (gladly, with great relief and a nod of the head). ‘ D—E—F ’ (spoken loudly and swiftly with an expression of increasing satisfaction and happiness). ‘ G ! ’ (a sudden peal of laughter which shook the room and echoed from the walls). ‘ H ’ (more laughter ; gradually subsiding). ‘ I—J ’ (laughter dying out and at last completely at an end). ‘ K ! ’ (a loud and ringing note of alarm accompanied by the raising of the hands to the breast). ‘ L ! ’ (the alarm increasing,

the hands lifted gradually and thrown back, the face showing considerable fear). ‘M!’ (uttered with immense relief, as though the danger was past, but the effect still apparent in nervous turning of the head to right and left). ‘N—O—P!’ (three gracious bows in different directions, as though three welcome persons had come on to the stage to meet the professor). ‘Q—R—S’ (three gestures each different from the others, indicating that the professor was shaking hands with each of the new arrivals). ‘T!’ (a sudden drawing back, as though the last of the arrivals wasn’t behaving nicely). ‘U!!’ (a most tragic and sudden explosion, accompanied by a dagger-thrust which settled the last of the arrivals and laid him dead at the professor’s feet). ‘V—W!!!’ (a sudden half-turn, during which the momentary triumph over the last of the arrivals was evidently swept away by the onslaught of the others). ‘X!!’ (a violent struggle, in which the professor was thrown this way and that by his invisible antagonists). ‘Y!!’ (a long-drawn, deadly hiss of rage, accompanied by a flash of victory in the eye and a rapid dagger-stroke, which prostrated another foe). ‘Z!!!’ (a loud cry of acute

despair; both hands pressed over the heart and the professor sank to his knees, thus indicating that his remaining foe had been too much for him).

It was a drama in a minute and a half, and we were all so much moved that we burst into loud applause. Then the professor regained his feet gracefully and bowed, as though we were an audience of a thousand people. This magnificent inspiration, executed with consummate *aplomb*, almost bewildered me and Mr. Smith and Brightwin by its magnificence. It showed, too, the sort of man who was going to take us in hand.

But Mr. Merridew made nothing of it. It was just a superb bit of spontaneous acting, dashed off as Michael Angelo would dash off a statue, or Beethoven a symphony.

In a way it was rather depressing, because it showed how much lay before us. But we were all excited and hopeful on the whole. Even Mr. Smith felt a sort of divine fire in his veins. He offered to stand Brightwin and me some supper after the lesson was over, and we gladly consented to let him do so.

Mr. Smith told us about himself presently—how he had come into a little money and was now in a position to give up his work (which, he said, had been of a subordinate character, but didn't specify) and seriously devote himself to the stage.

We listened to him very patiently and made a huge supper.

And afterwards, when we had seen Mr. Smith home to his wife and family off the Tottenham Court Road, Brightwin said that to be stage-struck at Mr. Smith's age and with his figure was a tragedy of the deepest dye.

"There are only certain parts he could play," explained Brightwin to me; "but his voice belongs to quite a different order of parts. He has the voice of a tragedian and the body of a second low comedian. In fact, there is no hope for him that I can see."

"He might, however, start a theatre; which would be hope for us, if we kept in with him," added Brightwin thoughtfully.

IX

My victorious career received a very serious check about this period. I had, of course, bought Aristotle's *Poetics* and a cheap edition of *Hamlet*, and on one or two occasions I much regret to say that Mr. Westonshaugh, the best and kindest of men, had found me reading them when I ought to have been registering policies of insurance.

He had rather a stealthy way of approaching the staff of the Country Department from the rear, and, though a large man, revealed the instincts of a hunter wonderfully developed; so that he was often upon his game, which generally consisted of junior clerks, before the quarry was roused and aware of its danger.

The first time he cautioned me; but the second time I grieve to relate that he reported me. It was, of course, his duty to do so; and I believe he regretted the necessity. But so it was; and it meant that I had to

go before the Secretary of the Apollo and meet him face to face, much to my disadvantage.

The Secretary was, of course, the pivot round which the whole office turned. The Directors themselves seldom dared to interfere with him; for he was the hero of a thousand fights, so to say, and had climbed to the giddy altitude of the secretarial chair after a lifetime spent in heroic and successful efforts to advance the prosperity of the Apollo Fire Office. His fame naturally extended far beyond the walls of the Apollo. He was known throughout the whole insurance world as a light in the darkness. He had written more than one book on the subject; and the *Insurance Guide*, the journal of the insurance craft, seldom appeared without some respectful allusion to his great fame. I believe he was a sort of king over the secretaries of other Fire Offices; at any rate, nobody ever pretended there was anybody to equal him. He was called Septimus Trott, Esquire; and there came a gloomy morning when I stood before him alone in the silence of the secretarial chamber. But, of course, the interest was profound, for my fate might be said to hang in the balance. I

had seen Mr. Trott far off on several occasions, and had once, in the Board Room, where I went with a message, witnessed the solemn sight of him conversing on equal terms with six Directors simultancously, and easily making them think as he thought, thanks to his enormous experience and easy flow of words ; but this was the first time I had approached him *in propria persona*, as we say.

He was of a sable silvered, with a florid complexion, and his eyes had a piercing quality. He wore gold-rimmed glasses divided horizontally, so that when he looked through the tops of them he could see men and things about him, and when he looked through the bottom he could read documents and data, or see to write himself if necessary.

He now looked through the upper storey of his glasses and focused me with an expression that I had never seen before on any human countenance. It was not pity, by any means, and it was not scorn. You couldn't say that Mr. Trott was angry ; but then you certainly couldn't say that he was pleased. He regarded me thoughtfully, yet without what you might call much emotion. He was perfectly calm, yet under his easy

self-control I soon found that he concealed a good deal of quiet annoyance at what he had heard about me. Having studied my features, which I had striven to make as apologetic as possible, he dropped to the lower storey of his glasses, and I perceived that he had open before him some registers of my writing. They evidently dismayed him, and for some time he said not a word. At length he broke a silence which was becoming exceedingly painful.

“Mr. Corkey,” he exclaimed, “I believe you are in your eighteenth year!”

“Yes, sir,” I answered. “It will be my eighteenth birthday in the autumn.”

“And do you desire to celebrate that event with us, or elsewhere, Mr. Corkey?” he inquired.

I told him that I greatly hoped to celebrate it with him—at least, with the Country Department of the Apollo; and I breathed again in secret, for this showed that I was not going to be dismissed.

Indeed, Mr. Blades had told me that a man was always cautioned once.

“They never fire you the first time,” was his forcible expression.

But the revulsion of feeling caused by

knowing that I was saved made me strike rather too joyful a note with Mr. Trott.

"I'm very sorry indeed that Mr. Westonshaugh had to report me, sir," I said, in a hearty sort of voice. "It was well deserved, and I promise you it shan't occur again."

But the Secretary didn't seem to want my views. In fact, he held up his hand for silence.

"You are here to listen, Mr. Corkey," he replied. "Now, before me I have some of your recent work. Will you kindly consider these pages in an impartial spirit, and tell me what you think of them? I invite your opinion."

As bad luck would have it, before him were some registers of policies that I had done under very unusual pressure. In fact, I had made a bet with a chap called Mason that I would register twenty 'short period' policies quicker than he would register twenty of the same. My friend, Dicky Travers, held the stakes, which amounted to a shilling a side, and I won by one 'short period' policy in record time.

These things, naturally, I did not tell my judge, for they would only have hurt him and led to Mason. Therefore, I merely

regarded my handiwork with honest scorn and an expression of contempt, and said the writing was not worthy of the Apollo Fire Office.

“ I had come to the same conclusion,” said Mr. Septimus Trott. “ We are of one mind, Mr. Corkey. Now, I appeal to your honour as a gentleman, and as one who is drawing a good salary here—I appeal to you, Mr. Corkey, to do your work in future so that we may respect you and value your services, and not deplore them. Remember henceforth, Mr. Corkey, that from ten until four, or later, as the occasion demands, we have a right to your whole time and energy and attention and intelligence. To deny us that right, and to offer us less than your best, is quite unworthy of you, and neither just nor honest to your masters. Good morning, Mr. Corkey; I feel sure that I shall not have to speak again.”

I did not know what to answer, for this exceedingly fine man had made me feel both uncomfortable and mean. I had, however, to say something, so thanked him and promised that he should never be bothered by me any more. But he had already dismissed the subject and was buried in a pile

of complicated documents, which were no doubt destined to melt under his hands like the dew upon the fleece.

I returned calmly to my department and wrapped myself in silence as with a garment. But I concealed a bruised heart, as the saying is, and determined to rectify this unpleasant event as swiftly as possible. I decided to stop after hours for six consecutive nights and write till eight, or even nine o'clock, and so produce an amount of work during the current account that should delight Mr. Westonshaugh and gratify Mr. Trott, if he ever heard about it. I wanted; before everything, to show them I bore no malice, but quite the contrary.

Mr. Blades thought my idea good, and that very night I stopped on and on, long after the staff had gone. It was a weird and interesting thing to be alone with my solitary gaslight in that huge and empty office. All was profound silence, save where my industrious pen steadily registered policy after policy. Here and there out of the darkness glimmered a knob of brass or some such thing, like the watchful eye of a beast of prey, and far below one heard the occasional, eerie rattle of a hansom, or cry of a human voice

in the empty City. In all that huge hive of industry only I appeared to be humming! It was a great thought in its way. And yet I felt the presence of my colleagues in a ghostly sort of fashion, and knew where the warlike Bassett sat, and the musical Wardle, and the sporting Tomlinson, and so on. But, of course, they were all far away in the bosoms of their families, or elsewhere, as the case might be.

And then came a strange experience—the event of a lifetime, or, at any rate, the event of mine so far, for suddenly and without anything much in the way of premonitory symptoms, I got an urgent craving to write a poem! It is impossible to say how it came, or why; but there it was. My fatal experiences of that day, and being so sorry for myself, and one thing and another, depressed me to a most unusual flatness; and then nature, apparently rebelling against this flatness, urged me to write a poem upon a dire and fearful subject.

You might have thought that I should have taken refuge from the troubles of the morning by writing something gladsome and joyous, or even a regular, right-down hymn, with hopeful allusions to higher things; but far

from it, owing to the gloom of the silent office, or the gloom of my mind, or perhaps both together, I produced stanza after stanza of the most deathly and grim poetry you could find in the language. It was called "The Witches' Sabbath," and I amazed myself by the ease with which I handled corpse-candles, gout of blood, the gallows tree, ravens, owls, bats, lightning, the mutter of thunder, the stroke of Doom, spectres, demons, hags, black cats, broomsticks, and, in fact, every dreadful image you can possibly imagine from the classics at large. These things simply rolled off my pen; I could hardly write fast enough to catch up with the dance of horrors which seemed to get worse and worse in every stanza; and I remember wondering, while my nib flew, that if this ghastly thing was the result of a mild and temperate rebuke from Mr. Septimus Trott, what sort of poem I should have made if he had dealt bitterly and sarcastically and cruelly with me. I stopped to examine the question, and finally decided that it was the great patience and tenderness of Mr. Trott that had reduced me to this black depth of despair; and I believed that if he had slated me with all the force of barbed invective

undoubtedly at his command, I should have gone to the other extreme and not stopped overtime, and been reckless and ferocious and mad, and very likely have produced a wild drinking-song, or some profane limerick of a far lower quality than this stately poem with all its horrors.

One verse especially pleased me, and I set it down here without hesitation, because the time was actually coming when my poem would see the glory of print—not, of course, that I should see the glory of anything else in the way of reward. But merely to be in print glorifies one for a long time.

“Through a dim gloaming with the hurtling crash
And thunder of their batlike wings they came.
Their tongues drip poison and their eyes they flash;
And twenty thousand others did the same.”

The effect of this horrible poem was entirely to restore my happiness; and hope, long a stranger to my heart, as they say, returned, like the dove to the ark. I simply rejoiced at the poem. I stopped registering policies for that night and copied out the twelve verses of “The Witches’ Sabbath” carefully. I said farewell to the messengers whose duty it was to guard the Apollo by night; and I took home

my poem, filled with a great longing to read it to Aunt Augusta. She consented to hear it and was much interested; and so surprised and pleased did she appear to be that I had not the heart to tell her about the sorrowful thing that led to it.

The next morning my poem was the first thought in my mind, and I read it carefully through before getting up. The glow had rather gone out of it; still, it was good. And I considered whether I should read it at the office to Mr. Blades and others. But, strangely enough, though my affection for Mr. Blades was deep and lasting, as well it might be, considering all his goodness, something seemed to whisper to me that he would not much like "The Witches' Sabbath." I had a wild idea of asking Wardle to set it to music, but second thoughts proved best, as so often happens, and I just kept the poem in my desk and waited till the next lesson at the Dramatic School. For I felt that in the genial atmosphere of tragic art my poem would be more at ease than in a hive of industry.

I improved it a great deal before the time came for the next meeting with Mr. Merri-

dew. Not, of course, that I was going to show it to him ; but I felt I should have courage to submit it to my fellow-pupil, Brightwin, and ask him for his candid opinion upon it. Of course, measured according to Aristotle, it might have been found wanting ; because there was simply not a spark of pity about it. But the terror was there all right.

To close this rather painful chapter, I may mention that I stuck to the resolve to work overtime for a week, but was not rewarded by inventing another poem. However, the result seemed highly favourable, for Mr. Westonshaugh complimented me on my work in the account, and showed a manly inclination to let the dead past bury its dead, as they say.

X

THE rehearsal of the first scene of *Hamlet*, conducted by Mr. Montgomery Merridew, went off with great verve. We were all very eager to please him and there was naturally a good deal of excitement among us to know how he would cast the parts.

He decided that Leonard Brightwin should be Horatio and George Dexter Marcellus. I was Bernardo, and Harold Crowe took the rather minor part of Francisco. Mr. Henry Smith had the honour of playing the ghost, and it was very valuable to him for stage deportment and gesture; but not much use in the way of his *h*'s, because the ghost does not make a single remark in the first scene. Nevertheless, after Horatio, who was easily the best, came Mr. Smith. In fact, he quite suggested "the Majesty of buried Denmark," in my opinion, though he didn't manage his hands well, and put rather too much expression into his face for a ghost.

Dexter as Marcellus was bad. He made Marcellus a bounder, and when he said, referring to the ghost, "Shall I strike at it with my partisan?" you felt it was just the sort of utterly caddish idea that Dexter would have had. My rendering of Bernardo was not well thought of, I regret to say. Mr. Merridew explained that I must avoid the sin of overacting.

He said :

"You must correct your perspective, Mr. Corkey, and remember that the dramatist designed Bernardo for an honest but simple soldier. He is, we see, punctual, and we have every reason to believe him an efficient member of the corps to which he belonged. He is, moreover, an officer ; but more we do not know. You impart to him an air of mystery and importance that are calculated to arrest the audience and make them expect wonderful things of him, which he is not going to perform. In the matter of deportment, Mr. Corkey, a man of your inches cannot be too careful. Your legs—you understand I don't speak offensively, but practically—your legs are long and thin. They are, in fact, the sort of legs that challenge the groundlings. It

behoves you, therefore, to manage them with perfect propriety ; to tone them down, as it were, and keep them as much out of the picture as possible."

I very soon found, when it came to stage deportment in earnest, that I had not time left to overact Bernardo. In fact, when I once began to grasp the great difficulties of walking about on the stage with the art that conceals art, I had no intelligence left for acting the part at all, and my second rendering of Bernardo was colourless, though my legs were better.

After a third rehearsal Wilford Gooding took my place, and he gave a very different reading. In fact, when he and his friend Harold Crowe found themselves together on the stage, they showed a decided inclination to repeat their former imitation of the "Two Macs," and Mr. Merridew reproved them angrily.

"You are here to work, not to fool, gentlemen," he said, "and if you think the battlements of Elsinore by moonlight at the beginning of *Hamlet* is the proper place to be funny, then let me tell you you have mistaken your vocation."

A rehearsal, in fact, has to be conducted

with deadly earnestness, and for beginners to take it in a casual or lightsome spirit is a very great mistake. There is nothing lightsome about it.

Mr. Merridew directed us to buy a further book, written by himself, on the subject of voice production. It contained throat exercises for strengthening the larynx and diaphragm and vocal chords, and so on ; and among other things, for a full hour every day we had to go into some private place and shout the vowels with the full blast of our lungs.

“ It will make a great deal of noise, and people won’t like you for doing it,” prophesied Mr. Merridew, “ but you must not mind a little opposition. Your voices naturally want quality and tone, and these can only be got with severe practice. Recollect that merely to speak is useless ; you must shout.”

He told us where to buy his book, which fortunately cost no more than sixpence—in fact, only fourpence-halfpenny in reality.

During this lesson Mr. Merridew had to leave us for a short time, to attend a meeting of the Directors of the Dramatic School ; and while he was away I ventured to show Leonard Brightwin my poem entitled “ The

Witches' Sabbath." He read it with great interest and was much struck by it.

"I'd no idea you were a writer," he said; and I told him I hadn't either; but he believed it was in me. He, too, was a writer, and he offered to introduce me to a friend of his who was an editor.

A glimpse of literary life was, of course, worth almost anything to me, and I said that I should be exceedingly thankful to meet a professional editor, if he didn't think such a thing was above me. Then he explained that his friend, Mr. Bulger, was an enthusiast of the drama and edited a penny paper called *Thespis*.

"He owns it and does everything himself but print it," explained Brightwin. "It is not strictly self-supporting yet, but the amateurs read it regularly, for he devotes a good deal of attention to their performances. I often go and criticise them for him. He pays expenses and hopes some day to do more than that. I write a good deal for him. My belief is that he would publish that poem in his paper, though, of course, I can't promise."

With the kindness and enthusiasm of the true creator for an inferior artist, Brightwin

promised to show the poem to Mr. Bulger, and I was still thanking him most gratefully when our preceptor returned.

His face was gloomy, but he did not divulge the reason, and he proceeded with the rehearsal.

An event of considerable interest overtook me an hour later, when the evening's work was at an end. As I left the school I met an old acquaintance of the opposite sex, and instantly recognised the grey-eyed girl who was waiting at the pit door of the Lyceum on the memorable occasion when I fainted. She remembered me, too, and was able to tell me the details of the event after I had lost consciousness.

She was a pupil like myself, only she belonged to the girls' class.

"They ain't going to allow mixed acting for the first six months," she said. "Funny, ain't it? You'd think it was as tricky as mixed bathing. How are you getting on?"

I told her of Mr. Merridew and *Hamlet*; and she told me that there were seven girls in her class, and that none of them could 'act for nuts,' to use her own forcible expression.

An oldish woman had come to see the grey-

eyed girl home, and when I offered to accompany them to their door, the oldish woman refused in peremptory tones. In fact, you might almost have thought she regarded me as a shady character. It transpired that she was the cook of the grey-eyed girl's mother, and had been told off to the service of seeing the pupil to and from the classes at the Dramatic School. Before the cook's rebuff I had, of course, to explain that I was also a pupil at the school, and a person of the most honourable behaviour where the fair sex is concerned ; but the cook was not prepared to argue, and hurried away her charge without more words.

I met the grey-eyed girl again, however, the very next evening—at a first-night—and we enjoyed an uninterrupted conversation of three hours before the doors opened. Thus a friendship was established of the most interesting character ; for we found that we had much in common, and I was able to tell her several things which she did not know.

She was not a happy girl, for her parents only allowed her to study for the stage under protest, and her family was entirely against her and of a very unsympathetic turn of mind ; but she felt that, sooner or later, she

would triumph. She indicated by certain allusions to my necktie and hands that I interested her. She considered that I had artist's hands, which in its turn interested me a great deal, because my aunt had noticed it as well as this penetrating, grey-eyed girl; and in return I ventured to tell her that her eyes were exceedingly remarkable. I hinted that I wrote poetry as well as acted, and, getting rather above myself, as we say, told her that a poem of mine would probably be appearing in a well-known theatrical journal called *Thespis* at no distant date. I'm afraid in my excitement I even hinted I should be paid for it, which was going too far.

She said :

“ Lor ! Fancy ! ” Then, after a pause, she remarked, looking at me sideways under her eyelids, that perhaps I should be making poems to her eyes next, since I seemed to think they were “ a bit of all right.” The idea had not occurred to me ; but now, of course, my chivalric instincts, hitherto somewhat dormant, came to my aid, and I assured her that the poem was only a question of time. In fact, we may be said rather to have gone it, and when the doors were open

and we entered the theatre, I sat beside her.

I may state here that I had no objection to girls as a class, or in a general way—in fact, rather the contrary, if anything. But they were not so interesting to me as men; and I also understood that there is not a rose without a thorn, as the poet says.

There are nocturnal girls in London known, generally speaking, as ‘light.’ They are as common as blackberries in the Sacred Writings, and Shakespeare and the classics generally; and I may say that they have often linked their arms in mine, when I have been returning home after nightfall through some of the main London thoroughfares.

The first time this happened, being new to their unconventional ways, I explained to two girls, who approached me simultaneously, that I didn’t know them. Whereupon, with the swift repartee for which this class is famous, they told me that they were the Duchess of Edinburgh and the Empress of Russia, and that they were stopping with Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace, and had just popped out for a breather before supper. Of course, the right thing to do is to take these dashing meteors in their own

spirit ; and when they invited me to return with them to the palace, I explained that some other night I should be delighted to do so, but that I was bound for Marlborough House myself on this occasion, and already half an hour late. They appreciated the *bon mot* and rather took to me. Though doubtless they might have been called bad girls, nobody would have called them bad company. They had an air of abandon and heartiness which put you entirely at your ease with them. In fact, when they asked me to stand them a drink, I very nearly did so ; but not quite. Instead, I left them abruptly and vanished into the night, followed by epithets humorous in their way, but not intended for publication.

To return to Brightwin : in due course he took me to see Mr. Bulger, editor of *Thespis*, and I found myself confronted with a type of the poet mind. Mr. Bulger was evidently a dreamer. His great ambition centred upon a State theatre for England, similar to that in foreign countries. He had very exalted opinions and an intense hatred of bad Art. He wanted to gather round him a band of young enthusiasts who would work for love ; because, as he explained to me,

the pioneer is seldom rewarded, excepting with the laurels of fame.

“Even these,” said Mr. Bulger bitterly, “seldom encircle his own brow. You will generally find them on the bronze or marble forehead of his statue, long after he has vanished into the dust.”

In this high strain he talked, and I saw in a moment that I stood before genius. His soul looked out of his eyes and made them water. His physical frame was of no consequence, and one forgot it when he talked. I trembled to think that this aspiring man was going to read my poem; but he did so, and Brightwin and I sat silent and watched him. Once or twice he nodded in a slightly approving way; and once or twice he shook his head, and I felt the blush of shame upon my cheek.

When he had finished, he said:

“Quite excellent, Mr. Corkey; we must publish this in the paper. There are, however, some failures of technique and a few flashes of unconscious humour that will be better away. May I take it that you will not mind if I edit the poem for publication?”

Little knowing what this exactly meant,

I replied that it would be a great privilege to me if he would do so.

“ Good,” he said, and put my poem under a paper-weight upon his desk.

We then discussed the drama, and he told us exactly what the young actor should think and feel about his profession. It was clear that I had not thought and felt at all rightly on the subject of the stage, for I had rather intended to shine, and be somebody, and play the tragic lead, and so on. But Mr. Bulger was all for quite a different spirit. He worshipped at the shrine of Art, and explained that in the service of Art we must regard the world and ourselves as well lost.

He advised a spirit of self-sacrifice, and admitted it was not so much the ruling principle in the histrionic mind as it should be. He said some hard things about actor-managers, and declared that in some cases the charwomen who cleaned their theatres were doing more for Art than they were. His eyes blazed against actor-managers in general, and they must tremble when they hear his name.

Presently we rose to take our leave, and then, diving among a mass of tickets and documents, he produced a card of

admittance to the Clapham Assembly Room on the occasion of an amateur theatrical entertainment a fortnight hence.

“ You can try your hand at that, Mr. Corkey,” he said to me. “ You may, in fact, criticise the show for our columns. Keep it short, and don’t indulge in pleasantries at the expense of the company. The Macready Dramatic Club of Clapham is a well-meaning body and their productions are most painstaking. Let me have an account of your expenses, as I shall defray them according to my rule.”

This was, naturally, a very great moment for me. I had but one fleeting twinge that perhaps it was rather rough on the Macready Dramatic Club of Clapham ; but I thanked Mr. Bulger heartily for placing such confidence in me, and promised that I would devote the whole of my energies and experience to the performance.

Not until Brightwin and I had left the editorial presence did I begin seriously to doubt ; but he assured me that it was quite unnecessary.

“ My dear chap,” he said, “ you spend all your spare time at the theatre ; you are studying for the stage, and you have

an immense natural aptitude for the art; therefore, if you are not good enough to review the efforts of a purely amateur crowd of this sort, you ought to be."

So I imitated Brightwin's slightly scornful view of the Macreadies of Clapham, and felt that, if I could keep up this haughty spirit through the actual performance, all might possibly be well.

XI

I WAS now quite one of the busiest men in London. Every moment of my time was occupied, and I felt it a bore to have to go to bed at all and waste precious hours in the arms of Morpheus.

First there was, of course, the office ; then my elocution and stage-gesture work for the drama ; then running at the L.A.C. ; then cricket matches on Saturday afternoons, which were very refreshing to me, especially as I was doing fairly well in them ; then literature, in the shape of an order from Mr. Bulger to go and criticise the amateurs of Clapham ; and lastly an idea for another poem—but not about the grey-eyed girl. One lived in a regular maelstrom, if the word may be pardoned ; and, as though all this were not enough, Mr. Westonshaugh suddenly sent for me and told me that I must appear on the following Monday morning at the West-End Branch of the Apollo !

“I have selected you, Mr. Corkey,” he said, “to help our branch during the usual quarterly rush of work. At these times the branch stands in need of assistance, and the experience will be very desirable. Be at No. 7 Trafalgar Square, sharp at ten o’clock on Monday next, and let me hear my confidence is not misplaced.”

On telling Mr. Blades of this event, he said that it was an excellent thing for me, and would introduce me to some of the leaders in the Apollo Fire Office.

“You will be in the hands of Mr. Bright and Mr. Walter,” he said; “and they are two of the most original and delightful men in London. I have the pleasure of knowing them personally, and you can tell them that you are a friend of mine, which will interest them in you.”

I thanked Mr. Blades for this further example of his unwavering kindness to me, and he gave me a brief description of the men who were to command my services in the West End of London.

“Bright is the best all-round man in the A.F.O.,” said Mr. Blades, meaning, of course, the Apollo Fire Office. “He is a good

sportsman, and was also a volunteer in his time. He is the champion of the office at billiards, and in his leisure he is a County Councillor and a keen politician. There are great stories told about him in his earlier days in the City. He was a dare-devil man then and took frightful risks. I don't mean insurance risks," added Mr. Blades, "but sporting risks, involving danger to life and limb. For a wager he once walked round that narrow ledge that surrounds the top of the gallery outside this department. You know the place. One false step would have dashed him to instant death; but he didn't care. He didn't make the false step. It is a record. We haven't got any chaps like that now."

I instantly went out to look at the ledge mentioned by Mr. Blades, and the sight of it impressed me enormously. You would have thought a bird would have hesitated to walk along it.

"He must be a great man," I said, "and have a nerve of iron."

"He has," assented Mr. Blades. "And he has a wide grip of politics, too; he is a keen debater and will set some of your ideas right on many subjects. He under-

stands capital and labour and such like; which you do not."

I admitted this, and then asked about the remarkable points of Mr. Walter.

"Walter is a ray of sunshine," answered Mr. Blades. "He has a nature none can resist, and is the most popular man in the office. He is a most humorous man and will make you die of laughing. He has two brothers on the professional stage, and he is for all practical purposes a professional actor himself; but he thinks two brothers on the regular stage are enough. He plays parts in public, however, and is a comedian who has nothing left to learn. If he chokes you off this nonsense about the stage, it will be a good thing done."

I could hardly believe my ears, for Mr. Blades described just such a man as I hungered to know. Whether he would be interested in an utter beginner was, of course, only too doubtful; but, as Mr. Blades said that he was like a ray of sunshine, I hoped with a great hope that he would shine on me a little if he had time.

My impatience for Monday to come was so extreme that during Sunday I took the opportunity to go down to Trafalgar Square

and look at the outside of our West-End Branch. Trafalgar Square is naturally too well known to need any lengthened description from me ; but I may mention that the National Gallery stands on one side, and our West-End Branch on the other, with Nelson's Monument between them. Nothing else really matters.

Our premises were stately without ostentation, and richly but not gaudily decorated. The entrance was hidden under a shutter of iron, and the windows were also concealed in the same manner. The building ascended to some rather striking architectural details at the top and was, upon the whole, an imposing pile, though without the gloomy grandeur of the Head Office in Threadneedle Street, E.C.

Punctually to time, I arrived on the following morning, and was greeted with the utmost friendliness. The Manager of this most important Branch was called Mr. Harrison, and I consider that he was the most dignified man I had yet beheld in the flesh. For pure dignity it would have been difficult to find his equal. He said little, but pursued the even tenor of his way and controlled the great business of the Branch

with a skill begot of long practice. He was slightly bald, very handsome, and very thoughtful. His thoughts were, of course, hidden from the staff, as a rule, but he was a most popular Chief, and everybody took a pride in doing what he wished with the utmost possible celerity. He did not rule by fear ; but by his great dignity and aristocratic manner. He was never flustered, never excited and never annoyed ; and this fine manner, of course, left its mark on the whole of the West-End Branch. In fact, I found there was a different atmosphere here, and the staff looked at life from rather a new point of view. I felt my mind broadening from the moment I arrived. The men all had such wide ideas. This, no doubt, was owing to the proximity of Buckingham Palace to some extent ; also the Houses of Parliament and the National Gallery. It is true that I was next door to the Bank of England in the City, and that, in its way, enlarges the mind on financial subjects ; but to be in a place where Queen Victoria might drive past the window at any moment, and yet leave the staff perfectly cool and collected, was very impressive. In fact, there was an element of awe.

Mr. Bright proved to be my personal Chief, and indicated my work with affability combined with speed. He was a very masculine man, with blue eyes of extraordinary brightness, and a genial manner of tolerant amusement at life in general, that doubtless concealed immense experience of it. He was fair and athletic, and had a most unusual way of coming to the heart of a matter and not wasting words. He feared nothing, and his knowledge of his official duties was, of course, supreme. But he carried it lightly.

I had never seen the great, British public coming in to insure its goods and chattels before ; but they continually poured in at our West-End Branch ; and to see Mr. Bright and Mr. Bewes and Mr. Walter stand at the counters of the office and deal with the fearful complexities of the highest insurance problems was a great experience for me.

Mr. Walter was even more wonderful than Mr. Blades said he would be. His knowledge ranged over every branch of Art, and he was just as much at home in a Surrey-side theatre, laughing at a melodrama, as he was in the National Gallery among masterpieces of painting, or at St. James' Hall listening to the thunderous intricacies

of Wagnerian music. He understood nearly as much as Mr. Merridew about the stage, and was himself an accomplished histrion, well known to many professional actors. At Trafalgar Square there are, of course, great natural facilities for approaching the Strand ; and Mr. Walter had availed himself of them, with a result that he knew the haunts of the sock and buskin as few knew them.

In person he was of medium stature, with an eye wherein Momus had made his home. He extracted humour from everything, and his facial command was such that while his audience might be convulsed with merriment, not a muscle moved. Occasionally he and Mr. Bright would indulge in a war of wit across the floor of the house, as they say ; and on these occasions it was utterly impossible for me to pursue my avocation of registering policies.

Of Mr. Bewes I need only say that he was a silent and an obviously brainy man. He had a short black beard, a penetrating glance from behind his spectacles, and was a Roman Catholic. Of this important but secretive man I can mention one highly interesting fact. He never went out of doors for lunch, but descended to a lower chamber,

where one might have a chop or steak, cooked by the Senior Messenger of the West-End Branch. Mr. Bewes always had a chop, except on Friday, when, being a staunch Catholic, he denied himself this trifling pleasure. But the extraordinary thing was that he never varied his lunch, or branched off in the direction of a steak or sausage. Thus he ate five chops every week, year after year, excepting when away for his holidays, when, of course, the staff did not know what he ate. For fifty weeks in the year he persisted in this course, with a result that the simplest statistics will show he ate two hundred and fifty chops per annum. A further calculation was also possible, which produced even more remarkable results, for it transpired that Mr. Bewes had been in the Apollo Fire Office for forty-eight years, and had persisted in his regular habits within the memory of man. Therefore, it followed that during his official career he had devoured no less than twelve thousand chops ! One might work this out in sheep, and doubtless find that Mr. Bewes had consumed a very considerable flock in his time. His health was good, and his memory unimpaired ; but he was now nearly seventy

years of age, and proposed retiring on a pension fairly soon.

It gave one a good idea of the age and solidity of the Apollo, when one heard of a life like this devoted to its service. In fact, in the words of the poet, it can truly be said that "men may come and men may go; but the Apollo goes on for ever."

It would be impossible to describe how Mr. Bright and Mr. Walter enlarged my mind. They did not do it on purpose, or in an improving manner, but they just showed me, in casual conversation, their knowledge of life and its realities and the things that matter and the things that do not. And over it all was cast a mantle of easy tolerance and patience with the fools who came to insure, and the idiots who didn't understand the very rudiments of the science, and the occasional shady customers, who gave wrong change and pretended they had made a mistake, and so on. It was the hand of steel in the velvet glove with Mr. Bright. I should think he must have been the hardest man to score off in the entire Apollo. His repartee was of the deadliest sort, and, on principle, he never allowed himself to be worsted in argument. You might have

described his line of action as a combination of the *suaviter in modo* with the *fortiter in re*; while Mr. Walter trusted almost entirely to the *suaviter* style, combined, of course, with a sense of the ludicrous which constantly enabled him to see funny things that nobody else saw. He was a mine of rich and rare quotations from the dramatists, and would apply these with an aptitude little short of miraculous. He would make puns at a moment's provocation, and his draughtsmanship, in the impressionistic style, was such that he would make a lightning sketch of a man to his very face, while engaged in insuring his household goods. Occasionally Mr. Harrison felt called upon to check the universal hilarity; but he always did it with reluctance, for he also had a keen sense of humour, especially for jokes involving the Irish dialect.

Into this cheerful and exhilarating hive of industry I came, to find everybody most kindly disposed towards me. The work was, of course, hard; but it was lightened by occasional gleams of Mr. Bright or Mr. Walter; while another most excellent and genial man also came and went. He flitted in and out mysteriously, and proved

to be called Mr. Macdonald. He was, therefore, of Scottish origin, and his work concerned the mysteries of Life Insurance. The science is even more abstruse than Fire Insurance, and needs what is known as the actuarial instinct. This must be rare, for I heard Mr. Bright declare to Mr. Macdonald that the great actuary is born, not made. Then there were also surveyors—men of special knowledge—who also came and went, and other junior clerks, who were rather more austere to me than the senior ones.

It was here, on the third day of my visit, that Mr. Bright kindly corrected my views with regard to demand and supply and other pressing questions of the day.

In politics I was a Conservative, but only by birth, and only up to the time of going to the West-End Branch of the Apollo. Then, under the greater knowledge and more philosophical intelligence of Mr. Bright, I began to calm down. It happened over a matter of a tailor. My Aunt Augusta, womanlike, attached importance to my clothes, and now directed me to buy a new suit. Mr. Walter was good enough to tell me of his tailor, who was a man of temperate views in the matter of cost, and I went

to him. It was not far to go, as his emporium happened to be next door to the Apollo.

Well, this man was distinctly haughty. He was a large, amply-made man with a yellowish beard and full eye ; and he looked down the sides of his nose like a camel. I told him that I had come to be measured for a suit of clothes, and he showed no interest whatever, but merely beckoned a lesser man and left me with him. Presently he strolled back, while I was being measured ; and when, to show the gulf there must always be fixed, as I thought, between the customer and the tradesman, I hoped his business was prosperous and offered to let him have a pound or two in advance. At this he appeared amused, and asked me if I was one of those American millionaires in disguise. In fact, he was not content with putting himself on my level, but rather clearly indicated that he thought himself above it. This view from a tailor had all the charm of novelty to me ; but I felt myself grow rather hot, and in my annoyance I tried a repartee in the style of Mr. Bright.

“ Is it true that it takes nine tailors to make a man ? ” I said.

“It depends,” he answered. “I expect it would take nine men like you to make a tailor.”

Now, even to a tyro in repartee, it was of course apparent that I had got the worst of this. There ought to have been something further to add on my side; but my admiration at such a brilliant flash of badinage was such that I could only laugh with the greatest heartiness. I was, however, merely laughing at the humour, not at the beast of a tailor; and when I had recovered from my amusement, I told him so.

I said: “That’s jolly good; but, at the same time, you oughtn’t to talk to new customers in this withering way. You don’t know who I am. I may be the son of a duke, and worth very likely ten or fifteen pounds a year to you for the rest of your life.”

It then transpired that he had seen me in the office, when he went to pay his own fire insurance a few days before.

“You have a yarn with Mr. Bright and Mr. Walter,” he said. “They’ll tell you a thing or two well worth your knowing.”

I fell in with this suggestion and submitted the case to Mr. Bright, who spoke in the following manner :

“ To put on side, because you think you are more important than that tailor, is absolute footle, my dear Corkey,” he declared. “ That tailor, if you’ll excuse me for saying so, is worth forty thousand of you. He’s richer ; he’s wiser ; he’s smarter ; he’s worked harder ; he knows more ; he’s travelled farther ; he’s better-looking ; in fact, he can give you yards and a beating in every possible direction ; so why the deuce do you think yourself, in some mysterious way, the better man ? Where do you reckon you’re better ? ”

“ Well,” I said, “ my father was a soldier and died for his country.”

“ That’s all right,” said Mr. Bright. “ Your father was a hero, no doubt, and any properly minded person would have treated him as such. But you’re not. You haven’t died for your country, by the look of you, and haven’t the smallest intention of doing so. My grandfather was a bishop ; but I don’t expect people to ask for my blessing on the strength of it. There’s only one exception to the rule that one man’s as

good as another, my dear Corkey—*only one exception.*”

“And what is that ?” I asked.

“The only exception is—when he’s a jolly sight better !” answered Mr. Bright. “You must judge of a man by himself, not by the accidents of birth or cash. The tailor next door has won his place in the world by hard work and sense and brains ; therefore he has a perfect right to reserve his judgment, so far as you are concerned, until he sees what you are good for. And, seeing that he’s got probably a thousand pounds to every one of your shillings, the spectacle of you advancing a quid on your clothes—to keep him going—naturally amused him.”

This was my first introduction to political economy and the rights of man, so naturally I found it exceedingly interesting. In fact, so much did the force of Mr. Bright’s arguments impress me that, in a week, I was an advanced Socialist, and going too far altogether in the opposite direction.

But now an exciting event claims my attention ; for at the West-End Branch a fresh duty devolved upon me, and I had to attend upon the Directors of the Company,

when they dropped in from time to time to put their signatures to the new policies. Every policy had the signature of two Directors upon it, otherwise it was not a complete legal document; so the great men came occasionally, and I had to stand beside them, blotting-paper in hand, and blot their names as they wrote them, and draw away each policy in turn as it was signed.

Judge of my great pleasure when who should arrive one morning to put his signature to policies but my old friend, Mr. Pepys! I carried in a hundred policies for his attention, and beamed upon him with the utmost heartiness; but only to be met by a look of polite, but complete, unrecognition! It was, as it were, a further illustration of the great gulf between capital and labour—Mr. Pepys, of course, standing for the former commodity. But, though he did not associate me with his past, Mr. Pepys was exceedingly polite. He adopted the genial manner of a man who falls in with a strange but friendly dog, and encourages it.

After signing twenty policies, he tired and sighed and had to rest. Then, being the

kindest of men, he addressed a few words to me on an official subject.

“Had any fires lately?” he asked.

But I didn’t know in the least, as fires, of course, belonged to one of the highest branches of the subject. I chanced it, however, and said :

“Nothing of much consequence, sir.”

“Good!” he answered. Then he was seized with a sudden fit of caution.

“But you keep an account of them, don’t you?” he asked, almost anxiously.

This afforded me the extraordinary experience of finding a man who knew less about fire insurance than I did; and I remembered how, in the far past, months ago, Mr. Pepys had spoken slightly of his knowledge of the business. I felt quite an old, trusty official after this—one of the faithful, dogged sort of men who are actuated solely by enthusiasm for their masters’ interests. I slightly patronised Mr. Pepys, but not intentionally. I said :

“Oh yes, sir; we don’t allow them to pass.”

“That’s right!” he replied, and showed a satisfaction which may or may not have been genuine.

“ They are all embalmed in the archives of the Society, sir,” I added.

He looked at me doubtfully after this, and didn't seem to be sure of his ground. At any rate, it silenced him ; to my disappointment he made no further remarks about fire insurance or anything else, but took up his pen again, sighed, and signed a few more policies. At this moment another director entered, and Mr. Pepys wished him good morning, and he said, “ Morning ! ”

He was a very different type of Capital. He was, in fact, a retired general officer of some repute in his time, which was, however, long past. He had recently been made a peer, and from being called Lamb had soared into a title and taken the name of some place that interested him in Scotland. I doubt, when selecting his title, whether he had remembered the policies of the Apollo ; for while ‘ Lamb ’ is a word you can dash off in a second, ‘ Corrievairacktown ’ is not. He laboured frightfully at it and heaved like a ship at sea, and sometimes actually forgot how to spell it ! He jerked his snow-white head abruptly, as though he had acquired the habit of dodging cannon-balls, and from time to time he gave off little sharp explo-

sions of breath, like a cat when trodden upon.

This man realised his own greatness in a way that perhaps nobody else did. He was a Conservative to his soldierly backbone, and I think sometimes, when he came to the Apollo for the tame occupation of signing policies, he was almost ashamed that a man, who had seen many a shot fired in anger and moved like an avenging spirit under the hurtling wings of the God of War, should have come down to signing policies for such homely things as—cooking utensils, and so on.

To illustrate the nerve and courage of Mr. Bright at a supreme crisis, I may tell you that in his younger days he had once been attending to General Sir Hastings Lamb, as he was then, and during an explosion on the part of the gallant warrior he hurled fifty or sixty policies in a heap to the ground. Doubtless, he expected Mr. Bright to bound forward and pick them up again ; but far from it !

Mr. Bright, well versed in Capital and Labour and Political Economy and the Rights of Man, knew that he was not there to pick policies off the floor which an irritated representative of Capital had thrown upon

it. He knew the machinery of the office provided that, in such a contingency, he must ring the Board Room bell and summon a messenger, for the subordinate task of putting the policies on the table again. Accordingly, he summoned a messenger and directed him how to proceed. Whereupon, the representative of Capital subsided instantly and signed the rest of the policies like the lamb he was in those days. Undoubtedly you might call this a triumph for the sacred rights of man ; and it also showed that Mr. Bright's moral courage was equal to his physical, which is saying a great deal.

XII

“WITH an auspicious and a dropping eye,” as Shakespeare says, I returned in due course to the Parent Office of the Apollo. I was glad to go back to Mr. Blades and Travers and other friends; but I was exceedingly sorry to leave Mr. Walter and Mr. Bright. In fact, I missed them a great deal, and wrote to them once or twice; and they answered without hesitation, and hoped to see me again at some future time.

And now I was faced with my first great critical task for Mr. Bulger, and secretly I viewed it with great nervousness, though openly to Brightwin I approached the test in a jaunty spirit. Needless to say I had taken preliminary steps, and the greatest of these was to hire a dress suit. At this stage in my career, unfortunately, to buy a dress suit presented insuperable difficulties; but I found from fellow-pupils at the Dramatic

School that one might hire for a merely nominal sum. So I hired, and had a dress rehearsal of the part I was to play at Clapham Assembly Room, in which my Aunt Augusta and her servant, Jane, constituted the audience.

Then came the important night. I returned home direct from the office, partook of a slight repast, and reached the Clapham Assembly Room threequarters of an hour before the doors opened. This was rather feeble in a way, and not worthy of Mr. Bulger, or *Thespis*, because we all know that professional critics dash up at the last moment in their private broughams and sink into a sumptuous stall just as the curtain rises on new productions. But I had come, as a matter of fact, in a tram and was far too early. A sense of propriety, however, told me that I ought not to be there—skulking about at least an hour before I need be; and so, with a fair amount of presence of mind, I started off to take a look at Clapham, which was a district quite unknown to me. I decided with myself that nothing would make me return to the Assembly Room until ten minutes before the curtain actually rose. I should then lounge in, present my ticket,

and appear with a bored and weary air among my fellow-critics.

But as all roads were said by the ancients to lead to Rome, so all roads at Clapham appear to lead to the Assembly Room. I walked away again and again and kept going in directions that seemed to point exactly opposite from the Assembly Room, yet, sooner or later, I invariably found myself back in the same old spot. The exterior of this edifice was of an unattractive architecture, and not until two minutes before the doors opened did people begin to collect in front of it. After being, as it were, the hero of a hundred first nights in London, this audience at Clapham appeared piffling ; but as the performance was for a charitable institution, many came actuated by philanthropic emotions and, of course, in a perfectly uncritical spirit. I, however, being there in the course of business, felt that I must not let any considerations of the charitable institution come between me and my duty.

The moment arrived, and I entered and presented my ticket with an air of patient and long-suffering indifference.

“ Press ! ” said the man in the ticket-office, and marked a number on my ticket

and handed it to another man. It was distinctly a moment to remember, and I forgot my hired clothes and everything, but just felt that I stood there as a representative of that glorious institution—the London Press !

My seat was in the second row and comfortable enough, without being sumptuous. I had a good view of the stage and I leisurely divested myself of my overcoat, saw that my dress shirt and tie were all right, pulled down my cuffs, and cast my eyes round the house. An amateur band, consisting chiefly of ladies, was playing, and a certain amount of verve and vivacity, though not much, filled the auditorium. Clapham had by no means turned out in its thousands ; in fact, it was quite easy to count the house, and I should be exaggerating if I suggested that there were more than two hundred and fifty persons in it. Subtract fifty for biased friends of the performers and take off another fifty for pure philanthropists, and that left not more than a hundred and fifty at the outside who could be supposed to have come in a critical or artistic spirit.

The critics did not reveal their personality or sun themselves in the front of the stalls, as I had seen them do in proper theatres on

a first night. They may have been there by stealth and in disguise ; but more likely they had sent substitutes.

An official in evening dress came to speak to me presently. He evidently knew that I wielded my pen for *Thespis*, and I could see that knowledge inspired his friendship. He hoped I was comfortable, and said that, after the second act, there would be whisky and soda and sandwiches going in the gentlemen's cloak-room. He added that they had all been in fear that the leading lady would lose her mother and be unable to act. But by good chance her mother was spared and she was going to play.

"Of course we had an under-study," explained the official, who proved to be the assistant acting manager ; "but no doubt you know, better than I do, what a bore it is for everybody concerned to have to fall back upon the under-studies."

"For everybody but the under-studies," I answered in a knowing sort of way, and the assistant acting manager said it was deuced good, and left me.

Of course the whisky and soda and sandwiches were a bribe, and I decided not to touch them, because you couldn't be un-

prejudiced about people who thrust whisky and soda upon you ; besides, I didn't drink whisky. Every critic worthy of the name snatches a glass of champagne between the acts of a new play, and then comes back to his seat licking the ends of his moustache ; but the management doesn't pay for the sparkling beverage—far from it : the critic pays himself and so preserves his right of judgment untarnished.

As a matter of fact, after the second act I did stroll round to see the other critics and hear if others agreed with my views of the performance. There were four obvious critics in the cloak-room, all eating and drinking with complete abandon and not saying a word about the play ; and there were several other people of both sexes also eating and drinking, who might, or might not, have been critics.

Somehow I found a plate of sardine sandwiches under my hand, so just ate perhaps six or eight, without, however, surrendering my right of judgment. There was no sparkling wine going, but siphons of soda-water and two bottles of whisky. I drank about a pennyworth of pure soda-water, smoked half a cigarette, and then

returned to the auditorium. No official spoke a word to me during this interlude. They may have felt it was better taste not to.

The play which was submitted to my attention was not in any literary sense a novelty, though there were several new readings in it, of which the least said the soonest mended, in my opinion. The drama in question was adapted from the French of that famous dramatist, M. Victorien Sardou, and it had taken two Englishmen to do it, both called Rowe, namely, Mr. Saville Rowe and Mr. Bolton Rowe. *Diplomacy* was the English name of the famous play, and there were seven men in it and five women. I knew the play, having seen it performed to perfection by Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft and their company; and the come-down from them to the Clapham Macreadies was, of course, tragically abrupt. But, as a critic, I naturally made allowance for the gulf that was fixed between professional and amateur acting, combined with the differences between an Assembly Room and a proper theatre.

There was much to praise; and no doubt if you are beginning to be an actor yourself and just finding out the fearful difficulties of the stage, it makes you more merciful than

if you are a critic who has never himself tried it, or knows in the least what it feels like. After the third act, the assistant acting manager came to me again, on his way to others, and said in a hopeful voice :

“ Going strong—eh ? ”

“ D’you mean me, or the play ? ” I asked, not in the least intending a joke ; but he took it for such and evinced considerable amusement.

“ You’ll be the death of me,” he said. “ You’re a born humorist. I expect I should be surprised if I knew your name.”

“ Very likely you would,” I replied guardedly. But of course I kept hidden under the critical veil and preferred to remain anonymous ; because, to have told him that my name was merely Corkey, and that I was a clerk in a fire insurance office, would have made him under-value my criticism ; whereas, in reality, some of the greatest critics of the drama the world has ever known, such as Charles Lamb, have pursued the avocation of clerk with great lustre and great honour to themselves and their employers.

The assistant acting manager asked me to come behind after it was over and be

introduced to some of the actors and actresses. He evidently observed that I was still in my first youth and might be dazzled; but though I should very much have liked to fall in with this suggestion, I felt that my critical faculty might be nipped in the bud, so to speak, if I approached the amateur histrion in the flesh on terms of equality.

Therefore I declined, and he hoped I would "let them all down gently," to use his own expression, and I saw no more of him.

At the end of the play there was much applause and cheering, and the ladies received bouquets of choice flowers handed up by frenzied admirers; but all this was, of course, nothing to me. I left the Assembly Room and passed out among the audience, like one of themselves. Then I walked all the way home, in order that I might collect my thoughts and reach a judicial and impartial frame of mind. Of course one must sometimes be cruel to be kind, and so on; but I felt in this case that it was possible, allowing for the low artistic plane on which amateurs are accustomed to move, to say some friendly and encouraging thing, accompanied, of course, by

the practical advice for which these Clapham Macreadies would naturally look in the pages of *Thespis* when next they purchased it.

My review occupied an entire Sunday in writing, and I don't think I overlooked anything or anybody. I began by touching lightly on the veteran French dramatist who was responsible for the play ; I then alluded to the translation, and the Bancrofts, and their reading of the parts, and so on. Then, slowly but surely, I came to the Macreadies and their production.

I began with some hearty praise of the general performance and the courageous spirit that had inspired the company to attempt so ambitious an achievement. I censured some of the scenery, but indicated how it might have been made better with a little more forethought. The music between the acts I examined very thoroughly and considered it not well chosen.

I may quote a passage or two, in order to show the general nature of the critique :—

“ To Mr. Frank Tottenham fell the part of Count Orloff, and we may say at once that his rendition left little to be desired. His conception was subtle and vigorous ; he managed his limbs with a sound know-

ledge of stage deportment, and though his elocution was faulty, his voice appeared well in keeping with the character. His make-up, however, left much to be desired. There was a lack of permanence about it, and it changed perceptibly during the course of the play."

Again I submit another passage :—

" Baron Stein requires an actor in every way out of the common for his adequate rendition, and if Mr. Rupert B. Somervail did not plumb the character to the core and betray the secret springs that inspire it, he none the less submitted a consistent and highly intelligent, if rather tame, reading. He has considerable promise, in our opinion ; and we shall watch his future progress with acute attention."

I took each character in turn in this way, and found that, to do real justice to the production, almost a whole number of *Thespi*s would be necessary. However, that, of course, was not my affair. I had undertaken to do a thing for Mr. Bulger, and I did it as well as I could. The rest I left to him.

Much to my regret, he took a very high-handed course with my review, and of

all the twelve pages of carefully written foolscap (not to mention that I copied it three times) he only availed himself of twelve lines. The analytic part he remorselessly cut out, and the advice to the Clapham Macreadies, and most of the adverse criticism. In fact, all you would have gathered from the few commonplace paragraphs that finally appeared was this : that the Clapham Macreadies had produced *Diplomacy*, in the interests of a Cottage Hospital somewhere, and that they had given a painstaking and capable performance before a distinguished and enthusiastic audience. The usual finish and style inseparable from a Clapham Macready production was apparent, the ladies' band excelled itself, and the Club was to be congratulated on adding another wreath to its laurels.

Of course, I had said all these things, but not in this bald and silly way. In fact, I was a good deal annoyed, and asked Brightwin rather bitterly what Mr. Bulger supposed I had hired a suit of dress clothes for, and gone down to Clapham, and racked my brain for twelve hours on Sunday, and so on ; but he assured me that Mr. Bulger had been tremendously taken by my review

and considered that I was a born critic and had really been far too conscientious in the matter.

It was my first glimpse behind the scenes of the press world, and I found that all that is written, even by critics, by no means gets into print.

I felt in the first pangs of disappointment that I would never put my pen to paper again, and so be lost to Mr. Bulger and *Thespis* for ever; but when a week or two later he actually published "The Witches' Sabbath" on the last page, under the title of "Original Poetry," I forgave him all. He had undoubtedly tampered with "The Witches' Sabbath" and reduced the number of the stanzas; but all the best of it was still there; and in print it looked decidedly literary. A great many mistakes had unfortunately crept into it; and Mr. Bulger had rather tampered with the terror in one or two of the most fearful verses. Still, it was mine, and as I passed home through London that day, with a copy of *Thespis* in my pocket, sent from the editor, I could not help wondering how little the hurrying thousands guessed that, as they carelessly elbowed me, they were touching

a man who had written original poetry which had been accepted and printed in a public newspaper, and might be bought at any bookstall in London. It was rather a solemn thought in its way, and I stopped at a bookstall near Regent's Circus to prove it, and threw down a penny and asked for *Thespis*. Much to my surprise, however, the man did not keep it in stock.

"We could get it for you, no doubt ; but I thought it was dead," he said.

"I can get it for myself, if it comes to that," I answered, picking up the penny again. "You ought to stock it. All theatrical people buy it, and if you thought it was dead, you thought utterly wrong. It's much more alive than you are."

I then left him hastily, before he had time to think of a repartee.

XIII

My efforts at the L.A.C. threw rather a cloud on my career at this season, for they continued to be crowned with failure; in fact, the bitter truth was slowly brought home to me that I was not a good runner. I won a heat in two handicaps, after repeated losses; but when it came to the semi-finals, in both cases my performance was quite beneath consideration. I was very unequal, and Nat Perry said that my running was rather 'in and out,' and Dicky Travers said that it might be misunderstood and count against me, though, of course, he knew it was not intentional, but just according to the sort of spirits I was in. For instance, if Mr. Westonshaugh had praised me at the office, or Mr. Montgomery Merridew had said I was getting on at the Dramatic School, then, curiously enough, I ran better; but if Mr. Westonshaugh had frowned, or Mr. Merridew had exhibited

impatience about my deportment or voice production, then my legs seemed to feel it, and sulk, and go slower, just when I most wanted them to go faster. Such, no doubt, is life.

But, to compensate for these reverses, most extraordinary success attended my cricket, and at the end of the season it was found on calculation that I headed the batting list with an average of forty, decimal something, for eight completed innings. We were the champion insurance office that season, thanks in a measure to me and another much better man called Finlay, who bowled at a great pace and was also a steady run-getter. Then came the striking news that there was a bat given annually for the best average. It was bestowed publicly, in the Board Room, and the Secretary presented it in the name of the directors.

For an instant I regretted my achievement; then I told myself that as a man destined to take his place on the public stage and be in the public eye, a trifling matter like a presentation-bat was all in the day's work. So I took the matter in a light spirit, and, though doubtless many felt very envious of my amazing luck, for there were

five 'not outs' in my average, I none the less treated it with great apparent coolness.

"You'll have to make a speech," said Mr. Blades, and I merely answered :

"Of course. You always have to in these cases"—just as though receiving testimonials was as common a thing with me as registering policies.

Behind the scenes, however, the case was very different, and, as the time drew nearer for the presentation of the bat, I found, rather to my surprise, that my pulse quickened when the thought came into my mind.

To quiet this effect, which was entirely owing to the fact of being unprepared, I planned a speech. Of course, a written speech was out of the question, as only monarchs read their speeches, which they take from the hand of a courtier at the critical moment ; but there is no objection to writing a speech first and then learning it by heart and delivering it in a slightly halting manner, as though it was an impromptu. This can be done, and with my histrionic attainments and increasing command of deportment and voice production, I felt hopeful that I should make a good impression. I felt my future official career might

depend to some extent on this speech, and I spent several evenings at home, writing it and touching it up, so that it should be worthy of the Apollo Fire Office, and of the occasion, and of me.

I never polished anything so much in my life, and after it was completed to my satisfaction I tried it on Aunt Augusta, to see how it struck her, as an unprejudiced person, ignorant of cricket and so on.

“ You are to imagine the Board Room of the Apollo full of a seething and serried flood of officials,” I said. “ The Secretary, the famous Mr. Septimus Trott, rises in his chair and addresses the meeting. The affairs of the cricket club are discussed, and its great success during the past season ; then he mentions me by name, and very likely a few of my best friends will raise a cheer. This cheer may possibly spread to men from the other departments, until the whole assemblage honours me with congratulations. I don’t say it will, of course, but it may. Then I step out and go up to the secretarial chair, and Mr. Septimus Trott, doubtless with a passing thought of how very different was the last time I came before him, smiles genially, picks up the presentation-bat,

which I have already chosen, and hands it to me. He bows ; I bow. Then I accept the bat in the true spirit of sportsmanship, and speak as follows.”

After that I read my aunt the speech, which was cast in these memorable words :

“ Mr. Secretary and gentlemen, it would be no exaggeration to say that I was amazed at my performance as a wielder of the willow during our past season on the tented field. In my earlier days, Mr. Secretary and gentlemen, such little success as I may claim for my efforts was with the leather ; but I never thought that, even helped with such phenomenal luck as has fallen to my share, I should top our averages and find myself standing before you in this honourable and invidious position.”

“ Surely not ‘ invidious,’ ” said Aunt Augusta ; but I held up my hand for silence, in the style of Mr. Merridew when interrupted, and proceeded with the speech.

“ The game of cricket, Mr. Secretary and gentlemen, is of surpassing antiquity ; but it is subject to those famous laws of evolution discovered by Mr. Darwin, and it has vastly changed for the better during the last half-century. We can hardly imagine that first-

class cricket is capable of further development; yet we are wrong. It is. And though I may not be here to see it, I have no hesitation in saying that some of you collected here to-day may live to observe vast changes in this historic, manly, and essentially English pastime.

“Much has already been done since the days of Captain Fellowes and Fuller Pilch to improve the national game; and though it is not possible to us of the Apollo Fire Office, owing to the many calls upon our time in this hive of industry, to acquire what you might consider perfection at what has been well called ‘the King of Games,’ still, we have already shown ourselves to be no mean foemen in the fifth or sixth-class cricket, which we practise so ably, as many a victory over our formidable antagonists in other insurance offices so clearly shows.

“That it has been my great good fortune, Mr. Secretary and gentlemen, to advance our prosperity to the flood-tide of success will ever be a source of proud gratification to me and my family in days to come; and I have no hesitation in saying that, among my possessions, be they great or small, in after life, I shall cherish this bat as a jewel in

my crown, so to say, and never relinquish it as long as my powers enable me to participate in our national pastime.

“ In conclusion, Mr. Secretary and——”

Here my Aunt Augusta interposed again—definitely and sternly :

“ Really—really—I do think it’s too long, my dear boy,” she said. “ It’s awfully good and interesting, and flows beautifully, and if I was a clerk in your office I should love to hear you say it ; but—but——”

“ You miss the elocution and the pauses and effects,” I explained. “ I’m merely *reading* it now ; but when I *deliver* it, everything will be quite different.”

“ It may be so,” she said, “ but I have a firm conviction that it is far too long for the occasion. You see, after the office hours are over, the men will all be wanting to hurry off to catch trains, and so on ; and it would be a fearfully disappointing thing for you, in the midst of your speech, if people began going out. Suppose, as an extreme case, that the Secretary himself, who is a very important and busy man, *had* to go before you had finished ? Think what a cloud it would cast, and how you would feel.”

Of course the vision of the Secretary slipping away, and the clerks stealing out one by one, was a very painful vision ; and my mind seemed to take hold of this gloomy idea of Aunt Augusta's and elaborate it, until I pictured a scene where I and my bat were finally left in the midst of the Board Room in solitary state, addressing the empty air !

" I hadn't looked at it in that manner," I told Aunt Augusta, " and yet it seems a frightful shame that this thing should all go for nothing."

" Couldn't you shorten it by about three-quarters ? " she suggested ; but I felt, somehow, that this was out of the question.

" It is a case of all or none, as we say," I replied, " and I am afraid it had better be a case of none. I should like to have delivered the speech, and I may tell you that what is called the ' per-oration ' was the best part of it. I worked up to a sort of a pitch in it—a pitch of true feeling. In fact, it was poetry ; and if I had done it properly, they'd have forgotten all about their trains and even felt that it was worth missing them. But all is now over. I expect you are right,

though, of course, it is impossible to be certain."

With these words, I made a quick movement and dramatically cast the manuscript of the speech upon the fire. I thought that Aunt Augusta, womanlike, would have leapt forward, smitten with remorse before the spectacle, and dashed at the grate and very likely burned herself in unavailing efforts to rescue my words. But she made no such effort, and expressed no remorse whatever. I could not help showing a little irritation.

"Hang it all," I said, "you might have asked to hear the peroration!"

She put her hand on my arm.

"I'm an artist too," she said, in her quiet voice, "but I'm old, compared to you, and my sense of humour has been sharpened through a good many sorrows as well as joys. My dearest boy, it wasn't any good—honestly—honestly. You can do a million times better than that. Just say what comes into your head, and you'll cover yourself with glory."

Of course the female sex is famous for a sort of intuition, and they often get clever and correct ideas without working for them like we men have to do. They have flashes

of sense, as it were, and though sometimes the flashes are right bang off, to use a slang phrase, still, there is no doubt that often the things they utter on the spur of the moment will be found to hit the right nail on the head. Aunt Augusta had sense, though the worlds of the City and of sport were, naturally, sealed books to her. I allowed her hand to stay on my arm, which I did not always do, and granted that I honestly believed she was very likely right.

“And if you’ve had a good many sorrows in your time, Aunt Augusta, I’m very sorry, and don’t wish to add to them,” I said. “In fact, really, in cold blood, looking back at my idea of a speech, with stage deportment, and elocution, and so on—and pathos at the end, it may have been infernal cheek to think of such a thing from a junior clerk to a crowd of grown-up men. They might have given me ‘the bird,’ which is theatrical parlance for hissing; they might have got right-down annoyed, and thought I was making game of them; they might even have taken away the bat!”

“No,” she said, “they would never have done anything like that; but I’m sure they would have thought you were making

too much of the whole affair; and that would have hurt your feelings."

So we left it in that way, and I not merely forgave Aunt Augusta, but thanked her for saving me from what might have been a considerable peril and very likely damaged my future prospects in the Apollo.

When the great evening actually did come, only about a dozen sporting clerks, including Mr. Blades and Dicky Travers, dropped in to see the presentation, and Mr. Septimus Trott, in about six well-chosen words, handed me my bat and congratulated me on winning it. In return I merely said: "Thank you, sir. I'm very glad to have had such luck."

It was like those rather dreadful accounts of hangings, when you read that from the moment of pinioning till the drop fell was a period of less than two minutes. Not one of the meagre handful of clerks who attended the ceremony need have feared to miss his train; and doubtless they were well aware of this before they came to the ceremonial.

On the whole, I wasted a good deal of valuable time and thought on this subject, and shall never regard it as one of the most

satisfactory things that happened to me during my first year in London. In fact, it was rather sad in a way, though very satisfactory from a purely sporting point of view.

XIV

JUST as my first year in London was drawing to a close I received the gratifying news from Mr. Westonshaugh that I might take a holiday of a week's duration. Naturally, my first idea was to go out of town, and Aunt Augusta reminded me that Doctor Dunston had said he would like to entertain me as a guest at Merivale when the opportunity offered.

But, strangely enough, I did not feel drawn to Merivale, because it so happened that I had seen the Doctor during the previous spring, when he came to London to buy prizes and attend one or two of the May meetings, which were his solitary annual relaxation. In fact, he had asked me to dine with him at his hotel, 'The Bishop's Keys,' not far from Exeter Hall, and I had gone, and found the Doctor changed. I couldn't tell how he had changed exactly, for he was still the same man, of

course, and still took the same majestic view of life; but somehow he had shrunk, and seeing him at 'The Bishop's Keys' was quite different from seeing him in his study at Merivale, surrounded by all the implements of the scholastic profession. His voice was the same, and his rich vocabulary, and his way of examining a question in all its bearings; but still, he had shrunk, and, a good deal to my surprise and uneasiness, I found myself actually disagreeing with him! He did not thoroughly realise what I had become; but that was my own fault to some extent, because the old fascination under the Doctor's spell had not entirely perished, and I found myself feeling before him just as I used to feel. Of course I ought to have talked freely to him and described the life I led and the various things of interest that had happened to me in London; but I did not. Instead, I listened to him wandering on about Merivale, and the new boys, and the leak in the swimming-bath, and the scholarship his daughter had got for Girton, and his wife's neuralgia, and his detection of the gardener's boy in a series of thefts from the boot-room, and so

on. He didn't like London, and had to take lozenges for his throat every half-hour. He was, in fact, not to put too fine a point upon it, a bore, and though my conscience stung me for ingratitude, I could not throw myself into the leak in the swimming-bath, or feel that the gardener's boy or the scholarship at Girton really mattered an atom. It was base on my part, but I could not help it, and, curiously enough, my conversation had the same effect on the Doctor that his had on me. The only difference was that he very soon stopped me when I began saying things he didn't like, whereas I could not, of course, stop him. Without saying it unkindly, I found that the Doctor had become rather piffing in his interests. He gave me a bottle of ginger beer with my dinner, while he drank a half-bottle of burgundy, and he showed in a good many little ways that he still regarded me merely as Corkey Major, and expected me to regard him as Dr. Dunston. But one must give and take in these matters, and when he began talking about what his old pupils had done in the world, and left me entirely out of the list of those who had made their mark,

I began to feel fairly full up with the Doctor, as they say, and knew only too well that in future I should manage to struggle on without seeing any more of him. Because living in London readjusts your perspective, so to speak, and it was rather sad in a way to see such a grand old scholar and large-minded man filling up his fine brain with such gew-gaws and fribbles as the affairs of Merivale. He was, moreover, more Conservative than ever, and I felt really ashamed to find anybody with such wrong ideas on demand and supply and the rights of man. But to have corrected his opinions on these subjects would have been an impossible task; because, as Mr. Blades once neatly said on another subject, you can't bring a back-number up to date, and the Doctor, while he might have appeared to the old advantage in the scholastic and venerable atmosphere of Merivale, was distinctly of the ancient and honourable order of back-numbers as he appeared at 'The Bishop's Keys' in London.

There was great unrest among the working classes at this time, and Dr. Dunston was very angry with the proletariat. "The sons of labour," he said, "will soon be the

sons of perdition, for, at the rate they are going, they will inevitably dislocate for ever the relations between Capital and Labour—with disastrous results to themselves, Corkey; with disastrous results to themselves!”

Of course, to one saturated in the sayings of Mr. Bright and Mr. Walter, these views appeared erroneous; but it would not have done to tell the Doctor that I was now a Radical. He must have felt it as a personal slight in his scheme of education. Still, I had to assert myself to some extent and didn't hesitate to smoke a cigarette with my coffee. It may be added that the Doctor didn't hesitate to resent it.

“A stupid habit, even in the adult, Corkey,” he said; “and I regret that you have allowed yourself to acquire it at your tender age. To suck into the system a deadening smoke from the conflagration of a poisonous vegetable has always seemed to me unworthy of a gentleman and a Christian. No doubt your companions have seduced you, but I am sorry the armour of Merivale was not proof against their temptation.”

After this I hid my secret flights toward literature and the boards. His view of the

theatre appeared to be that the Greek drama was worthy of all praise, but that the English drama was not. I asked him if he was going to see *Hamlet*, as performed by Mr. Irving and Miss Ellen Terry, and he said, "No, Corkey. The modern theatre is no place for a preceptor of the young. Shakespeare, in fact, is far too sacred a subject for the modern stage. The spirit evaporates, the poet takes wing, and what is left is not worth going to see. I read my Shakespeare in the privacy of my own chamber, Corkey; and I do not expect that the modern generation of actors can teach me anything I do not already know of the Swan of Avon, either from a poetic or philosophical standpoint."

To argue with this sort of thing was, of course, no work for me. I listened in silence, and concealed the pity combined with annoyance that was surging in my breast. I hated hiding from this religious-minded but parochial man that I was going on the stage, for it seemed mean to do so; but I also felt it was no good putting him to needless pain and very likely spoiling the effect of the May Meetings and doing him harm. So I changed the subject and asked him about

the prizes. He had been to the Army and Navy Stores for these, and had bought *Longfellow's Poems*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, and *St. Winifred's*, and *Masterman Ready*, and *Hours with a Microscope*, and *Hours with a Telescope*, and *Eyes and No Eyes*, and many another fine, old, crusted work, familiar enough to me in the past. In fact, I realised with interest that the Doctor's mind was standing still, and though there was something grand in a small way to see this steadfast attitude, like a lighthouse, to use a poetical simile, casting its unchanging beam over the tumultuous seas of Merivale, yet, somehow, in the atmosphere of the Strand, London (for 'The Bishop's Keys' were merely round a corner from the main thoroughfare), the beam of the Doctor was reduced to a mere night-light.

By good luck he was going to an evening May Meeting at nine o'clock, and he invited me to accompany him to hear an eminent Colonial Bishop on the Spread of Christianity in the Frigid Zone; but with unexpected courage I withstood him, pleaded an engagement, which was true, as it was a Dramatic School night, and left him at the threshold of Exeter Hall. Our parting was

marked by a cordiality that both of us were far from feeling; for I knew that I had disappointed the Doctor; and though, of course, he little knew that he had disappointed me, he had; and I felt an overpowering wish not to see him again. I had, in fact, now broken definitely with my past, and when, therefore, Aunt Augusta suggested that my week's holiday should be spent at Merivale, I negatived the idea without a division, as they say.

Aunt Augusta then rose to the occasion, with her usual kindness and generosity, and proposed a few days at a place familiar to her in Brittany.

“It is wild and lonely,” she said, “but it is very beautiful, and I can do some sketching if the weather permits, and you can practise elocution among the sand dunes and shout yourself hoarse.”

This offer of seeing a foreign country was far too good to refuse, and though financially such a thing was beyond my private resources, I had now made an arrangement with Aunt Augusta by which it was definitely understood that any advances which she might be good enough to make for the moment should be amply recognised at a later period

in my career, when money ceased to be the vital object it was at present.

She had not much, but still, far more than I, having made a niche for herself on the pinnacle of fame, and often selling a work of creative art for eight or even ten pounds. She promised, therefore, that when the time came for me to earn money on the boards and draw a salary in keeping with the dignity of a London actor, she would let me take the financial lead, so to speak, and richly reward her for her generosity of the past. In fact, it was understood that if Aunt Augusta cast her bread upon the waters, in scriptural language, it would return to her after many days—not like the talent hidden in the napkin, but more like the widow's cruse of oil, that increased a thousand-fold. I knew of course that this must happen, and I think she felt there was more than an off-chance of it. At any rate, she went on hopefully casting.

So we visited Brittany, and I enjoyed the interesting experience of a foreign land and a foreign language in my ears, together with foreign food and foreign money. A volume, of course, might be written about Brittany, and, as a matter of fact, many volumes have

been ; but it is not my intention to say anything on the subject here ; because, upon my return to London, much happened of a very abnormal character, and my recollection of the peaceful days, when I practised elocution in the sand dunes and Aunt Augusta painted pictures of the rather tame scenery, was speedily swept away to limbo.

Moreover, I had now reached within a week of my eighteenth birthday and, by a rather curious coincidence, the dreadful events now convulsing the metropolis culminated on that anniversary. But I must not anticipate. Though the proletariat was getting a good deal out of hand when I came back from France, no actual collision had taken place with Law and Order ; but, to use a well-known figure of speech, the lion was aroused and roaring, though he had not yet emerged from his den. To drop metaphor, I may say that Labour was up in arms against Capital, and Political Economy was at the last gasp.

At this grave crisis I found myself summoned once again to assist our West-End Branch, and then discovered, to my astonishment, that the proletariat had selected

Trafalgar Square as a sort of rallying-ground for their forces. Indeed, scenes of great unrest were daily enacted in that famous centre of civilisation.

Needless to say, the staff at our West-End Branch was deeply excited at the turn of affairs, and Mr. Bright seemed to think the problem the most serious that had arisen in politics for fifty years. He was not, however, entirely on the side of the masses, but felt rather doubtful if their leaders were guiding them aright. Mr. Walter never found much time to devote to politics, though a sound Liberal at heart; but what interested him was the artistic and dramatic aspect of Trafalgar Square when the horny-handed masses swept through it. As for Mr. Bewes, he went on eating his daily chop as though we were not on the edge of a volcano. Of course, as a stern Roman Catholic he was bound to believe that all that happens is for the best. This enabled him to keep his nerve in a way that was a lesson to us.

Mr. Harrison, our esteemed chief, was a Conservative, and he by no means believed that everything that happens is for the best. He heartily disliked the crowds in

the Square and was always glad when the time came to close the office and pull down the iron shutters. The directors also, who dropped in as of yore to sign policies, took a very unfavourable view of the situation and spoke harshly of the proletariat. They had a theory that the leaders of the people ought to be hung for sedition, privy conspiracy, and other crimes; and the newly made lord, known as Corrievairacktown, said he would like to see the Guards called out to send the vermin back to their holes at the point of the bayonet. He was a very unbending man in the matter of Capital versus Labour, and seemed to think that soldiers was really the last word on every subject.

Then, after a period of undoubted danger, there came the terrible day when Mr. John Burns felt it his duty to climb up between the Trafalgar Square lions and wave the republican flag of blood red above a sea of upturned faces. The air was dark and murky; Nature wept, so to speak, and heavy clouds hung low above the unnumbered thousands who listened with panting bosoms to the impassioned utterances of their leader. Like trumpet notes his fiery

syllables rent the welkin, and there was a movement in the masses of the assembled hosts, like billows driven by the wind over the sea. Their white faces were as foam on the darkness of dirty waves.

Fired to the fiercest enthusiasm by Mr. Burns, the proletariat now began to shout and yell with the accumulated hunger and frenzy of centuries of repression, and it was evident to the unprejudiced eye that they meant to make themselves respected and get back a little of their own, as the saying is. A hoarse and savage growl rent the air, and like hail the speaker, whose glittering eyes and black beard were distinctly visible from the windows of the Apollo, lashed his audience into a seething whirlpool of anarchical fury. Here and there the populace seemed to start forward on predatory thoughts intent; then they stood their ground again; and there were momentary intervals of silence in the riot, like the moments of silence in a thunderstorm. During one of these we distinctly heard a harsh and grating sound three doors down the street. It was a jeweller putting up his shutters. In that sound you might say was an allegory, for it typified the idea

of Capital funkling Labour. A few moments afterwards, Mr. Harrison himself stepped from his private chamber, walked to the outer door, and gravely and fearlessly surveyed the ominous scene. The masses were now out of hand, and their leaders, probably much to their own surprise and regret, had awakened a storm of unreasoning ferocity which threatened to plunge the West End into the horrors of civil war. At any rate, Mr. Harrison appeared to think so, for after studying the temper of the crowd, he returned to us and uttered these memorable words :

“Gentlemen,” he said, “this is revolution ! Pull down the shutters !”

Messengers hastened to obey his orders, and when iron curtains had crashed down between us and the stage of this stupendous spectacle, we took it in turn to look out through the letter-box.

Mr. Harrison, with all the courageous instinct of a British sea-captain, decided not to leave the Apollo that night unless a great change should come over the spirit of the scene, but for my own part I was panting to rush out and join the revolution—not with a view to assist it in any nefarious

project, but to study it from the artistic standpoint. Before I could start, however, the ferocious crowds had split up and swept in different directions. They went towards the west chiefly, and bursting in upon defenceless streets, that had not heard what was going on, surprised them painfully and helped themselves from the shops before their proprietors could arrest their onslaught. I came upon the people presently—to find them very far removed from what you might call a conciliatory attitude.

XV

THERE is nothing like personal contact with a thing to make you understand its reality, and when the revolution knocked my hat off into the road I felt myself faced with no idle dream. There was something about the top-hat of the common or garden clerk that angered the revolutionists, and they did not seem to recognise in me a toiler like themselves. Yet the only difference was that I worked a jolly sight harder than most of them, and they little knew that at that moment I was hurrying about among them simply to take mental notes in a highly sympathetic and artistic spirit. Mine was not the only top-hat that roused their ire ; in fact, they regarded this hateful but honourable head-covering as an embodiment of Capital ; therefore they knocked it off whenever they saw it among them. Legally this was assault, if not battery, but they cared nothing for that, and in

another and more ferocious sort of upheaval, no doubt, they would have knocked off the heads under the hats as well as the hats themselves. This, however, they did not do ; in fact, the revolution, taken piecemeal, which is the only way a single pedestrian can take it, was an utter coward, for at the word 'copper,' whole gangs of twenty or thirty men would evaporate, only to form again as soon as the guardians of the peace had disappeared. Such, indeed, was the celerity of the revolution when threatened with the law, that again and again the police charged thin air. Doubtless this was the result of hunger, for had the people been well fed, they would have been braver. But, of course, if they had been well fed, they would not have revolted. In fact, a revolution is a very good example of cause and effect.

My top-hat was knocked off for the third time in Oxford Street, and at the same moment somebody grabbed at my watch-chain and tried to possess themselves of my 'Waterbury.' In fact, the top-hat was really a source of danger, and, at the third loss, I ignored the hat, now much the worse for wear, and left it for the

younger members of the revolution to play football with. I then went on bareheaded, until reaching a small shop in a back street that had not been penetrated by the mob. Here I purchased a cloth cap of dingy appearance and a brown muffler, and, thus accoutred, I plunged into the fray once more.

The men in Oxford Street were armed with stones, and when a private carriage passed down the way, they broke the windows. The hansom, the harmless four-wheeler, and the groaning omnibus they did not molest; but a private carriage awoke their worst passions, and they smashed the windows, utterly regardless of the harm they might be doing to the occupant—fair or otherwise.

Disguised as one of themselves with the cap and muffler, I was no further molested, and spent an hour or two among the people, to find that, as the day advanced, they began to cool down. It seemed as if the fever of battle was burning itself out, and when there rose a rumour that the troops had been called into the streets to help the police, a great change came o'er the spirit of the scene. The revolution hated

to hear about the soldiers, because, of course, it was by no means ready for any such violent measures. In fact, so far as I was concerned, the incident was now at an end, and I returned home to Aunt Augusta full of my great intelligence. She had been painting rather industriously all day and had heard nothing of the peril that had threatened the metropolis. We talked a great deal about it, and she much regretted my top-hat and the events that had led to its destruction ; but, womanlike, a little personal trifle interested her far more than the calamity that promised to shake the forces of Capital and Labour to the core, and very likely convulse the civilised world ; and this was the trifling accident of my birthday.

I was, in fact, eighteen, and Aunt Augusta had already wished me many happy returns of the day and given me a present of an original and very beautiful water-colour drawing of the Thames at Westminster. But now she returned to the subject, though I tried to choke her off it and explained that after one reaches man's estate these accidental anniversaries are better forgotten.

“ If you don't remember anything that

doesn't matter," I said to her, "then you have all the more room in your memory for everything that does."

But she insisted on making a stir about my natal day, and since London was too unsettled, in her opinion, to go to a theatre, she decided to have a lively evening at home, beginning with a dinner of unusual variety and style. She was rather a classy cook and had learned the science when an art student in Paris; so she sent out Jane to get supplies, and asked me if I thought I could venture out, too, and buy a bottle of champagne. I felt secretly that, owing to the hunger and so on of the masses, one ought not to be drinking champagne on a night like this. It was that sort of callous indifference that caused the French Revolution, and I told Aunt Augusta that if the proletariat knew what she and I were up to, they might very likely swoop upon her flat and ransack it, or set it on fire. But she answered, very truly, that the proletariat would not know, and as to have argued further would have laid me under suspicion of cowardice, I went out to buy the sparkling beverage and bring it home. Luckily for the banquet, Aunt

Augusta had received rather a swagger commission for four of her etchings the day before, and so she was out of sympathy with the sufferings of the people and in sympathy with the anniversary of my birth.

We had a great time in a gastronomic sense. The meal embraced mock-turtle soup, an omelette with herbs chopped up in it, a pheasant and chipped potatoes, an apple tart and tinned apricots, anchovies on toast, pears, and a pineapple—all, of course, washed down with the juice of the grape and coffee.

Champagne is a most hopeful wine, which you can have sweet or dry, and after drinking a full glass, I began to suggest plans for improving the state of the proletariat, accompanied by a suspicion that their condition was not so bad as they wanted us to think. I talked a great deal to Aunt Augusta, and smoked a whole packet of cigarettes. She also smoked and drank her coffee and listened to me intently.

Presently, I began to discuss myself and my career, and thanked her very heartily for helping it forward to the best of her power, as she was doing.

She was kind enough to say that I had brought a great deal of pleasure into her life,

and she didn't know what she would do without me when I started rooms on my own account. I allayed her fears in this matter and promised I would not leave her for at least another year.

"From eighteen till nineteen you may count upon me," I said, "though after another year has passed, I don't know what may happen, because life is so full of surprises."

I then retraced the year, from the day that Doctor Dunston had sent for me to see him and I thought it was fireworks, up to the present moment in the throes of the revolution. It seemed almost impossible that so much could happen in the time; and as I smoked and indulged in a retrospect, as the saying is, I felt that the battle of life had been fought almost day and night. It had not yet been won, exactly, but there seemed fair reason to expect that with luck it soon would be.

In fact, the champagne made me decidedly too pleased with all I had done, and I believe, if the truth could have been known, that I talked rather big to Aunt Augusta and was on better terms with myself than the occasion demanded.

I began to sketch out my programme of

life for my eighteenth year, and there is no doubt that it was too ambitious. At any rate, Aunt Augusta evidently felt that I was planning more than I could perform, and she turned my thoughts into another channel.

“Of course all sorts of delightful new things will happen to you,” she said, “but it would be a pity to forget the adventures you have already had.”

“I shall never forget them,” I assured her; but she told me that memory played tricks with the wisest people, and strongly advised me to spend some few spare evenings in writing a diary of the past, while it was fresh in mind.

“It would be of great help to your next brother,” she told me. “He’ll be coming to London from Merivale in another eighteen months or so, and he’d love to hear all that has happened to you.”

In fact, Aunt Augusta openly advised a diary founded upon the past, and though my feeling is always to let the past bury the past and be pushing forward to fresh fields and pastures new, as the poet has it, still, there are many people—generally of the female sex—who take a great interest in

looking back to the time when they were younger, and mourning their golden prime—though it probably wasn't half as golden really as it seems to them, looking back at it. Therefore, solely to please my Aunt Augusta, I fell in with this suggestion and allowed myself to retrace my first wavering steps in the worlds of art and finance.

I set down the bare, unvarnished tale and told the simple truth as far as I could remember it. I preserved the aloof attitude of the born *raconteur*, and allowed my *dramatis personæ* to flit across the page in the habit in which they lived. I don't think I forgot anybody, and tried to deal impartially with them all. I told of my dinner with Mr. Pepys and his sister, of the official life, enriched with the ripe humanity of Mr. Westonshaugh, the generous friendship of Mr. Blades and the various characteristics of Dicky Travers, the hero of the L.A.C.; Bassett, the martial; Wardle, the musical; Tomlinson, the equine; and Bent, the horticultural. I told of my experiences with the shady customer, and on the cinder-path and the cricket-field. I retraced my approach to the drama, and the grey-eyed girl, and Brightwin, and Mr. Smith, and the others,

crowned by the soaring figure of Mr. Montgomery Merridew.

Then I chronicled the glad hour when I repaired to our West-End Branch and was lifted to the friendship of Mr. Walter and Mr. Bright; and lastly, I set down my earliest experience on the paths of literature, in connection with tragic poetry and dramatic criticism.

By a happy thought, I presented the manuscript of this 'crowded hour of glorious life,' as the poet has it, to Aunt Augusta on her own birthday. In fact, the thirty-eighth anniversary of that auspicious event was gladdened for her by the gift of my diary.

I rejoice to say that it afforded her pleasure, but regret to add that it was not the sort of pleasure I intended.

"Life, from the angle of seventeen, is so dreadfully funny—seen from the angle of thirty-eight," she assured me—though why it should be 'funny' she was not apparently able to explain.

"It may be interesting, but I don't see anything particularly funny about it, Aunt Augusta," I answered, slightly hurt at the adjective.

She did not attempt to argue, but continued :

“ You must promise me to write your eighteenth year, too,” she said. “ It will be something for your old aunt to look forward to. You must promise faithfully.”

“ That depends,” I answered rather coldly. “ Life is life, and I find it a serious thing, though it may seem ‘ dreadfully funny ’ to you, Aunt Augusta. Anyhow, funny or not funny, I shall not butcher my eighteenth year to make a Roman holiday, as they say. Important things *must* happen to me in my eighteenth year. Nobody can get through their eighteenth year without important events ; but if you think——”

“ Forgive me,” she said. “ I didn’t mean it for a moment. It’s a lovely diary, and I shall always treasure it, and I wouldn’t have a word altered—and it’s my birthday, so you mustn’t be cross.”

Well, I forgave her ; because she’s really a jolly old thing, and of the greatest assistance to me behind the scenes, so to speak. Besides, everybody knows that the feminine sense of humour is merely dust and ashes. No doubt, if I had written with badinage or pleasantry, in a light and transient vein,

enlivened by sparks of persiflage and burlesque, she would have taken it in a tearful spirit and cried over it.

But only a woman can laugh at the naked truth; men know it's a jolly sight too serious. To laugh at my diary was the act of the same woman who drank champagne on the night of the revolution. We must remember that they are not as we are, and treat them accordingly.

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